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THE NEW YORK TIMES



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## IN CINEMAS SEPTEMBER 1



# THIS MONTH AT EMPIRE

IT'S THE TRAILER we all needed, even if we didn't know it. When the first teaser for *Thor: Ragnarok* dropped in April, there was much whooping and hollering in the *Empire* office (only some it from me). Number one: HELA! That costume (holy hell, Cate Blanchett). Number two: the haircut. Number three: Jeff Actual Goldblum. Number four: the old friend from work... It was bold, it was funny, it looked completely bonkers and, hey, in the hands of Taika Waititi (director of *Empire's* film of 2016, *Hunt For The Wilderpeople*), what else could we possibly have expected? We wanted to know more though. Immediately. So we despatched Dan Jolin to the set in Australia to get the lowdown from Waititi and his awe-inspiring cast — turn to p84 for the full story.

That's not the only thing that's been going on in our world though — there was a *tiny* event called Comic-Con in San Diego. You may have heard of it? An *Empire* crew hopped on a plane and spent four days interviewing and photographing the world's biggest actors and filmmakers in our pop-up studio. There is a full 26-page bumper feature on p57 (you might be able to see the residual sweat) and, while you're at it, head to [empireonline.com](http://empireonline.com) for recaps on all of the news from Hall H and beyond. Comic-Con is a great indicator of what the next year or so in movies is going to look like. And, having surveyed the landscape and what's waiting over the brow of the hill, we can say that by God, it looks good.

With the likes of *Black Panther*, *Ready Player One*, *The Shape Of Water*, *Avengers: Infinity War*, *Deadpool 2*, *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* all out in the next 12 months, the future, friends, is bright. Ready? We are. LET'S GO.

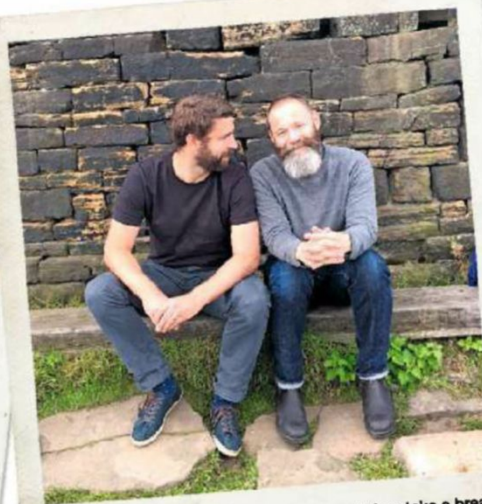
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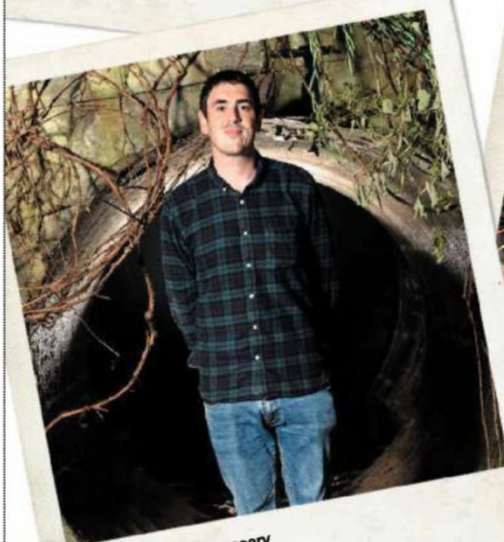
**TERRI WHITE**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



James Dyer and — yes! — Mark Hamill hanging out at D23.



Jonny Pile and director Francis Lee take a break from our photoshoot near Haworth, North Yorkshire.



Tom Ellen avoids the scary clowns on the set of *It* in Toronto.



It's amazing who you meet at Comic-Con — the Genie with Nick de Semlyen.



Chris Hewitt, Ben Mendelsohn and Nick de Semlyen in *Empire's* Comic-Con studio.



Chris Lupton, Stan Lee and Chris Hewitt mid-chat and shoot in San Diego.

ILLUSTRATION: DAVID MAHONEY



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A Marvel movie starring a tall, blond, impossibly chiselled Chris? About bloody time.

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Steven Spielberg returns with a new film crammed with '80s pop-culture references. Is he a good choice? Would he know anything about that?

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David Fincher, serial killer-obsessed director of *Seven* and *Zodiac*, has a new project all about serial killers. We are SHOCKED.

### 22 BORG VS MCENROE

The first of a new series where we preview 30-year-old sports matches... What? It's a film? Oh, as you were...



Clockwise from here: Thor: Ragnarok; Borg Vs McEnroe; Life; Logan Lucky and God's Own Country.



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SPINELINE ANSWERS ISSUE 339: NEWSSTAND "IT'S, LIKE, THE RAREST, IT'S ALMOST A SHAME TO SMOKE IT, IT'S LIKE KILLING A UNICORN WITH, LIKE, A BOMB" IS FROM PINEAPPLE EXPRESS. SUBS: "NO BLADES. NO BOWS. LEAVE YOUR WEAPONS HERE" IS FROM ROBIN HOOD. PRINCE OF THIEVES



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# TALK TO US

## COMMENT OF THE MONTH

### STATE OF INDEPENDENCE?

Will there ever be a third *Independence Day*, following the first and second — now that we have the means of alien technology of propulsion? Do let me know. (Note: Sorry about the errors in my writing. My handicap does not permit me to always get it right.)

ROBERT JONES, ESSEX

*We can't guarantee another film in the Independiverse, but for your charming, entirely error-free handwritten letter (which generously included a postage stamp), you win a year's Picturehouse Membership. That should be enough time for Roland Emmerich to sort out a threequel, right?*



**Picturehouse** Empire's star letter wins a Picturehouse Membership, plus one for a friend! Valid for one year at 23 Picturehouse Cinemas across the UK, including the flagship Picturehouse Central in London's West End, each membership comes pre-loaded with four free tickets, and gets you access to priority booking and exclusive discounts on everything in the cinema. When you write to us, please ensure you include your full contact details so we can arrange delivery of your prize.



### ON THE SECOND THOR: RAGNAROK TRAILER:

THOR 3 OR GUARDIANS 3? I CAN'T TELL THE DIFFERENCE. THOR AS STAR-LORD AND HULK AS DRAX. ASGARDIANS OF THE GALAXY?

MARTIN SECKER

### LAST TAKE CLUB

I very much enjoyed John Niven's view on *Skyfall* in last issue's First Take Club. I had begun to believe I was the only one who wasn't impressed by this film. I have loved Bond films in the past but this really degenerated into a violent shoot-out. Perhaps it's time that this franchise came to an end...

KEVIN HENNESSY, VIA EMAIL

*Come come, Mr Hennessy, you take just as much pleasure from watching Bond as we do...*

### GILDED CAGE

Please thank Alex Godfrey for his extremely entertaining *Con Air* 20th anniversary retrospective in the most recent issue. Can we expect similar retrospectives for all of Nicolas Cage's movies?

JO MURPHY, VIA EMAIL

*Work has already begun on our 22-page retrospective of Ghost Rider: Spirit Of Vengeance.*



SO THANKS TO @EMPIREMAGAZINE'S FEATURE I JUST WATCHED PEEPING TOM. GREAT IDEA, WATCHING THAT ALONE ON A DARK NIGHT.

@SARAH PARKIN1

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# PRE.VIEW

PULSE-QUICKENING MOVIE AND TV NEWS

EDITED BY PHIL DE SEMLYEN







FIRST LOOK

READY  
PLAYER ONE

OUT 30 MARCH 2018

# REALITY BYTES

Steven Spielberg's return to sci-fi  
will bend your mind

WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN

**DISCOUNTING THAT FLYING** saucer in *Indiana Jones And The Kingdom Of The Crystal Skull*, *Ready Player One* is Steven Spielberg's first dip into his beloved sci-fi genre since 2005's *War Of The Worlds*. An adaptation of Ernie Cline's 2011 bestseller, it sets his formidable world-building powers to work in a dystopian 2044 where big cyber is all-powerful. There, Tye Sheridan's gamer, Wade Watts, teams up with his crush, Olivia Cooke's whip-smart blogger Samantha Evelyn Cook, to find a life-changing Easter egg within virtual reality simulator, the OASIS. For Watts, it's love at first MacGuffin.

Tantalisingly, Spielberg is presiding over a quest filled with '80s Easter eggs referencing everything from Stephen King to *WarGames*. "It felt like pure adventure," says Cooke of the eye-popping adaptation. "It was Willy Wonka, it was Indiana Jones." Working with Spielberg conjured similar awe for the *Me And Earl And The Dying Girl* star. "When you're a kid wanting to be an actor, the idea of working with [him] sounds absurd. It was surreal."

Somewhere amid the big-budget dazzle of a Spielberg blockbuster is a thought-provoking tale of technology run amok. "[It's] scarily close to a world we're entering," notes Cooke of a setting stricken by an energy crisis and avaricious tech CEOs. The results should mix the cerebral with the spectacular — after all, this is one cautionary tale that comes with escapism built in.



ON-SET  
EXCLUSIVE

PHILIP K.  
DICK'S  
ELECTRIC  
DREAMS  
OUT AUTUMN

# DICK TALES

Channel 4's epic new anthology series brings the godfather of sci-fi to the small screen

WORDS DORIAN LYNSKEY

THE INTERGALACTIC COLONY of Primo 241 can be found just off London's A4. The location for *Impossible Planet*, one of the short films in Channel 4 and Amazon's ten-part Philip K. Dick anthology series *Electric Dreams*, has a shabby retro-futurist vibe. It may be set 500 years in the future but the inside of the Dreamweaver spaceship resembles an Atomic Age cocktail bar, all Formica surfaces and moulded furniture.

In *Impossible Planet*, written and directed by *The Night Manager*'s David Farr, a rich, old, blind woman (Geraldine Chaplin) hires two cosmic tour guides (Jack Reynor and Benedict Wong) to take her to Earth, presumed long dead. They plan to rip her off but discover, says Reynor, "that there's something happening on a different plane of existence" — a recurring theme for Dick, who constantly questioned the nature of reality.

Hollywood has feasted on Dick's chewy ideas for years with the likes of *Blade Runner*, *Minority Report* and *Total Recall*, and now it's TV's turn. Five years ago, Dick's estate, led by his daughter Isa Dick Hackett, approached veteran producer Michael Dinner to adapt his choice of the writer's 121 short stories. Two weeks later he called back: "How about all of them?" Dinner assembled a crack team of producers (Bryan Cranston, *Battlestar Galactica*'s Ronald D. Moore) and writers (Jack Thorne, Tony Grisoni, Matthew Graham). "My notion was to create singular points of view," he says. "I didn't just go to sci-fi geeks."

The stand-alone episode format (five filmed in London, five in Chicago) also helped Dinner attract Steve Buscemi, Timothy Spall, Anna Paquin, Greg Kinnear, Janelle Monáe and Cranston himself. "People responded to the material," Dinner tells *Empire*, "and the idea of playing in the sandbox for three weeks."

Regardless of genre, time period or set design, says Dinner, the appeal of Dick's stories is in ideas and emotions. "I've never read science-fiction," Geraldine Chaplin says apologetically. "I should, shouldn't I? This is so romantic and so strange."

**Clockwise from above:** Jack Reynor as space tour guide Norton with robot RB29 (played by Malik Ibheis and voiced by Christopher Staines); Benedict Wong as Andrews, his partner in crime; Norton faces bigger questions than he'd anticipated; Behind the scenes on set, with Geraldine Chaplin as the story's central rich tourist, beside Reynor.









# MARCH OF THE SPACE PENGUINS

Meet the Porgs. Watch those toys fly! **Below, top to bottom:** Rey (Daisy Ridley) will face bigger battles; Check out the spiked grabber; Laura Dern plays newcomer Amilyn Holdo.

The Porgs and four other things we discovered in the new *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* footage

WORDS JAMES DYER

DIRECTOR RIAN JOHNSON and the cast of *The Last Jedi* braved armies of Cinderella cosplayers at Disney's D23 Expo to unveil a new behind-the-scenes video. A treasure trove of clues and rumour confirmations, we break down the five big ones below. **WARNING! SPOILERS!**

## 1. REY WILL TAKE ON THE KNIGHTS OF REN

Daisy Ridley and Adam Driver's training clips raise a few tantalising possibilities. Rey is seen fending off three assailants with her lightsaber, feeding speculation her nascent Jedi will go head-to-head with the Knights Of Ren, glimpsed briefly during her vision sequence in *The Force Awakens*. What's more, we see Driver battling two similar opponents. Will he, too, fall foul of his former crew? Could Ren and Rey team up?

## 2. FINN RETURNS TO THE FIRST ORDER

John Boyega's Finn started out as a faceless stormtrooper, but he lands a promotion in *The Last Jedi*. In a fleeting scene, we see both Finn and Kelly Marie Tran's Rose Tico in First Order officer get-up as they go undercover behind enemy lines.



## 3. LUKE SKYWALKER BEFRIENDS SPACE PENGUINS

Thought BB-8 was the most adorable thing in the galaxy? Think again. Huggable avians the Porgs are set to be *Episode VIII*'s answer to Ewoks. In other star-fauna news, we meet a crystalline space fox and a big-eared steed we hear is ridden for sport in *Star Wars*' equivalent of the Grand National.

## 4. PHASMA GETS AN ENTOURAGE

Everyone's favourite chrome-plated Captain acquires some help in the form of the upgraded stormtroopers, glimpsed in their new, piebald 'Executioner' armour. Each comes equipped with a nasty-looking, spiked grabber. The Resistance, meanwhile, has gone full retro for their new hardware, dusting off some 1983-era A-Wings, last modelled at the Battle Of Endor.

## 5. LAURA DERN WILL SHAKE THINGS UP

The most striking new addition is Laura Dern's Vice Admiral Amilyn Holdo, with her Katy Perry-style violet rinse and sleek couture. Holdo is said to be a divisive character within the Resistance who could butt heads with Oscar Isaac's Poe Dameron. She'll see her fair share of action, too, although not a combat pro quite yet. "Every time I fired my blaster on camera, I kept saying, 'Pew, pew,'" confessed Dern. "I just couldn't help it!"

**STAR WARS: THE LAST JEDI IS IN CINEMAS FROM 15 DECEMBER**



## PRODUCTION NOTES

### Movies and TV shows in the works

1\_



13th's Ava DuVernay has a new Netflix project incoming. The *A Wrinkle In Time* and *Selma* director is focusing on the Central Park Five — teens wrongly accused of a gang rape in 1989 — in a five-parter featuring each man in turn.

2\_



Quentin Tarantino's next project will tackle the 1969 Manson Family murders. Manson and his followers brutally murdered Sharon Tate, the wife of director Roman Polanski, in Los Angeles. The shoot is planned for 2018.

3\_



Mike Leigh's new historical drama *Peterloo* has recruited *Silk* star Maxine Peake. Leigh's 21st feature film tells the story of Manchester's Peterloo Massacre in 1819, when British cavalry charged 60,000 protestors.

4\_



Joe Pesci is reuniting with Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro for *The Irishman*. Pesci will play Philadelphia Mob boss Russell Bufalino. Fellow Scorsese veteran Harvey Keitel has also signed up.



"Adventurous, imaginative and ballsy": Jodie Whittaker slips on the greatcoat of cosmic adventure.

## WHO BETTER?

Six of Jodie Whittaker's collaborators on why she's tailor-made to play *The Doctor*

WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN

### JASON ISAACS

CO-STAR, *GOOD*

"Jodie's going to own *The Doctor* for a generation. I already feel sorry for the next one. She's funny as fuck, kind in a way that's unfakeable and can simultaneously be utterly innocent and choke-on-your-tongue filthy. I can't wait for my two majorly Whovian daughters to see her — not as a feminist role model, but because she's going to blow them away."

### ALICE LOWE

CO-STAR, *ADULT LIFE SKILLS*

"She's someone you feel like you know when you see her on screen, yet she inhabits the character entirely. She's got this uncanny ability to switch from heavy drama to comedy, which not many can do. It's a bit greedy of her, really, to be so good at stuff. She's going to be an amazing role model for tiny female sci-fi fans."

### MICHAEL BERLINER

PRODUCER, *ADULT LIFE SKILLS*

"She has such a strong sense of fun, even though a lot of audiences may not have seen it yet. She's so warm and charismatic with such energy, and

almost an impishness. Another thing about Jodie is that she's got a strong sense of fairness — she always fights for the underdog and against any inequality. She's perfectly suited to being *The Doctor*."

### PADDY CONSIDINE

DIRECTOR, *JOURNEYMAN*

"Jodie has a tenacity and an authenticity she brings to her work, and as long as they invest in her natural qualities she will be a great *Doctor* — potentially the best ever. All the gender bullshit aside, they have cast a brilliant, inquisitive actor. She gets in the trenches when she has to, and she's a fighter. She will silence a lot of critics, I have no doubt of that."

### JOE CORNISH

DIRECTOR, *ATTACK THE BLOCK*

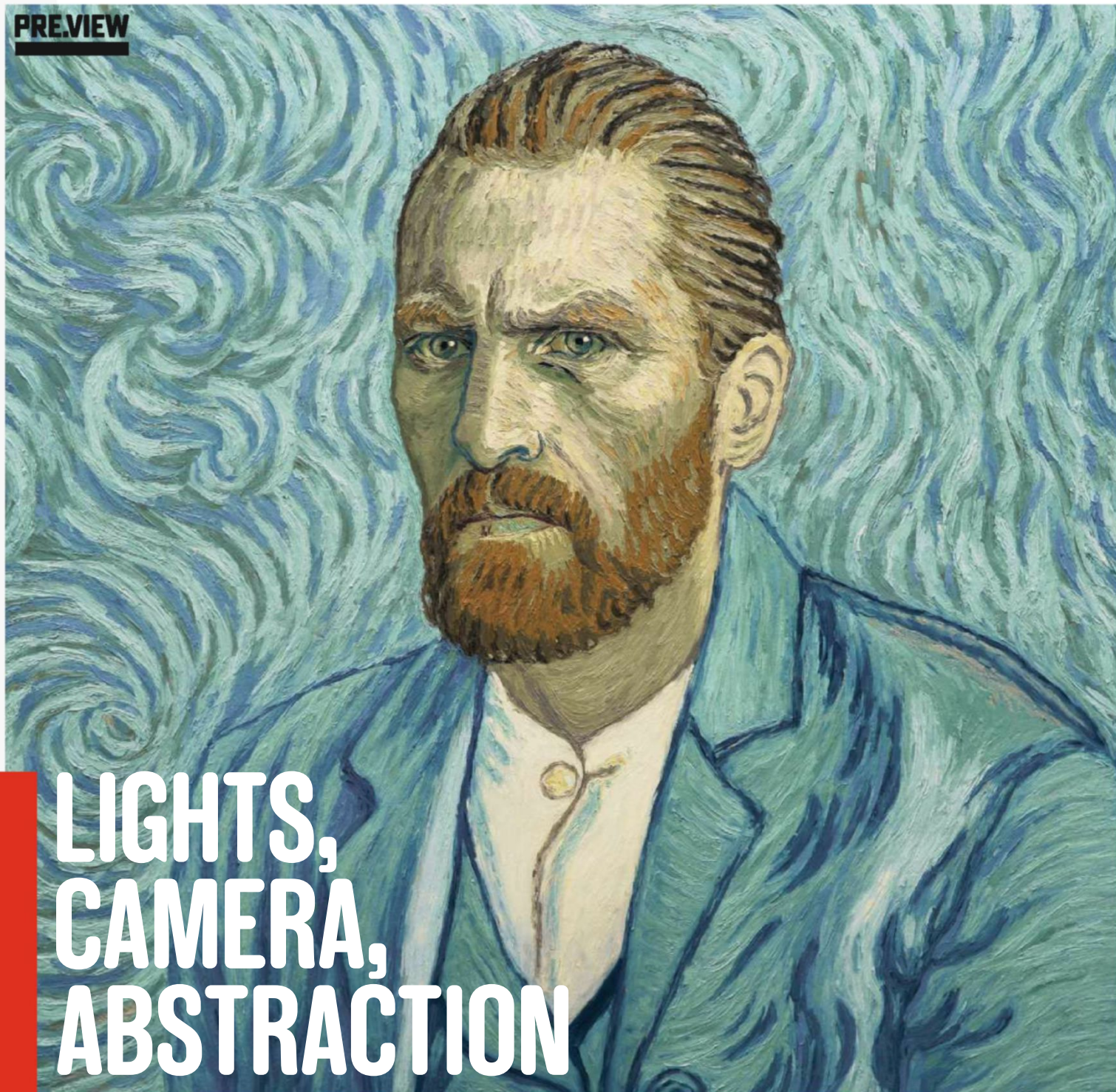
"For Jodie to even agree to do *Attack The Block*, a film with a first-time director and a cast of unknown teen actors with almost zero experience, shows how adventurous, imaginative and ballsy she is. She's strong and funny and smart, and a brilliant choice for *Doctor Who*. Plus, I know from experience that when it comes to playing a kick-ass medical practitioner who fights aliens, she's the best there is."

### LORRAINE ASHBOURNE

CO-STAR, *ADULT LIFE SKILLS*

"Jodie is an inspired choice for the role. I can't think of anyone better to smash all preconceptions associated with this iconic role. She's a beautiful everywoman with an extraordinarily wicked sense of humour and a quickfire wit. There's a delicious naughtiness about her. She's truly one of our finest actors and the TARDIS will be lucky to have her."





# LIGHTS, CAMERA, ABSTRACTION

Entirely oil-painted, Vincent van Gogh movie *Loving Vincent* is a true original

WORDS HELEN O'HARA

THERE HAVE BEEN other films about Vincent van Gogh — *Lust For Life* with Kirk Douglas, most notably — but *Loving Vincent* is unique. Designed entirely in the artist's deliriously beautiful style, it required 65,000 frames of oil-painted detail. Together they tell a story set just after the artist's death and incorporating many of his most famous works. "His paintings represent his life and himself," explains director Dorota Kobiela. "They're very

personal, very pure. The range of subjects is almost like storytelling: it shows where he slept, what he ate, who he spoke to."

Kobiela studied fine art before becoming a filmmaker, and in 2011 dreamed up a way to combine training and film. She had the idea for a painted short based around van Gogh's work and created in the artist's style, which co-director Hugh Welchman persuaded her to expand to feature length. After working on some test footage, they realised that free-painting the entire thing would take "something like 90 years". Instead, they recruited a talented cast, built sets designed to match van Gogh's paintings and shot the entire film in 20 days, using the edited results as the basis on which to animate.

So, Douglas Booth is recognisable as Armand, the impetuous son of van Gogh's postmaster friend

(Chris O'Dowd), who is dispatched to deliver Vincent's last letter to his brother Theo. With Theo also dead by the time he arrives, Armand becomes fascinated by the mystery of Vincent's final days, as related by actors including Saoirse Ronan, Eleanor Tomlinson and Aidan Turner.

"We tried to find actors that had the vibe of the characters [in Vincent's life and work], to show the soul of the person," says Kobiela. Her proudest 'get' was composer Clint Mansell. She listened to his scores while writing the script and pitched to him until she nabbed a gap in his schedule.

But the painting process was the truly mammoth challenge. The team recruited 100 artists, who had to learn to animate every brush stroke. As soon as each frame was painted and recorded, they would scrape away the work to start the next frame, making tiny adjustments





Creating a masterpiece (clockwise from left): Robert Gulaczyk as Vincent van Gogh; postman Roulin (Chris O'Dowd) with Armand Roulin (Douglas Booth); Louise Chevalier (Helen McCrory); Roulin (Booth).

to the facial expression or motion. In more distant action shots, such as those based on van Gogh's landscape *The Red Vineyard*, paint was added and added until it stood nearly a centimetre thick on the canvas. In total, the production got through 3,000 litres of oil paint.

An art exhibition of the paintings is planned to commemorate the seven long years of work. "It's a big relief to finally show it to audiences," admits the director. Are follow-ups a possibility? A Monet film? A da Vinci? "To be honest, I think it's only possible with Vincent because of the personal view his letters give us." Whether this starts a trend or not, Kobiela and her team completed a monumental task — and they didn't lose a single ear in the process.

LOVING VINCENT IS IN CINEMAS FROM 29 SEPTEMBER



Marlo (Nina Dobrev) finds herself flat out. Below: Ellen Page as Courtney on set with director Niels Arden Oplev. Bottom: Courtney (Page) is in for a shock.

## FUTURE SHOCKS

The director of the new *Flatliners* reboot explains how to modernise a cult hit

WORDS IAN FREER

THE STORY OF medical students who experiment with stopping their hearts to visit the afterlife, Joel Schumacher's 1990 culty *Flatliners* is a sky-high concept ripe for reworking. Director Niels Arden Oplev talks us through his five steps to update it for 2017.

### 1 \_ RESPECT THE CONCEPT

Keeping the essence of the idea intact was key. "I loved the ensemble feeling of doing something outrageous together like a secret society," says Oplev. However, he did change the constitution of the ensemble. "To make it four guys and one girl would feel wrong in the modern world today." It's now a mixed-race group of three women (Ellen Page, Nina Dobrev, Kiersey Clemons) and two men (Diego Luna, James Norton).

### 2 \_ MIX UP THE CASTING

Leading this group is Ellen Page as a driven medical student with a dark secret. Oplev was drawn to Page's ability to straddle mainstream and indie worlds. "Because it deals with death and what happens when you cross over, it naturally has a depth that goes beyond a normal studio film. Ellen leads us perfectly into that balance of intellectual and commercial."

### 3 \_ KEEP IT REAL

Top of Oplev's to-do list was injecting more credibility, especially around why anyone would do such a dangerous thing. Hence the setting has shifted to an ambitious Ivy League school, and



Oplev even hired engineers to create feasible MRI technology. "It's so real we need to have a sign saying, 'Don't try this at home,'" he jokes.

### 4 \_ TURN ON THE DARK

The film's afterlife has been rejuvenated. "It's mainly flashbacks in the old film," notes Oplev. "In this version, we go fully into a strange parallel world to our own. It's basically a trip, like you've taken LSD. It has to be like a thrill ride."

### 5 \_ BRING BACK AN OLD FAVOURITE

When the script called for a professor, it seemed a fitting way to pay tribute to the original flatliner — Nelson Wright, played by Kiefer Sutherland. "It gives a nice mystery to it — do they know he has done it himself? His performance is great."

FLATLINERS IS IN CINEMAS FROM 29 SEPTEMBER





FIRST LOOK

MINDHUNTER

OUT 13 OCTOBER

NETFLIX

# DEATH AND DEDUCTION

David Fincher returns to his favourite subject: serial killers

WORDS NEV PIERCE

“IT’S NOT JUST a longer *Zodiac*,” says David Fincher of *MINDHUNTER*, his new Netflix series about the birth of serial-killer profiling. “I mean, the first season’s probably only an hour longer...” He’s joking, or course, but there’s something in it. He may have won a BAFTA for *The Social Network* and an Emmy for *House Of Cards*, but Fincher knows that *Zodiac* and *Seven* will forever link him with this blood-soaked subject. He’s exploring the dark side again in a ten-part run inspired by the memoir of FBI veteran John Douglas.

*Hamilton* star Jonathan Groff plays an upstart agent based on Douglas, who believes killers can be learned from; Holt McCallany is his careworn partner. Together they interview incarcerated killers in order to catch others. “The most comprehensive look at psychosexual sadism was done in the [FBI’s] basement,” says Fincher. “There’s definitely a part of me that says, ‘Jesus, why do you continue to play into the argument that you have no imagination?’ But I’m not gonna apologise — this is the kind of stuff I find intriguing.”

That said, *MINDHUNTER* is about discovering what makes monsters, rather than retreading standard procedural beats. “There are no car chases,” stresses Fincher. “It’s not about getting ahead of the train. It’s about understanding what put the train on the rails.” Expect plenty of blood on the tracks.







# THE INTRO

Empire showcases tomorrow's stars today

## TOM TAYLOR

WORDS HELEN O'HARA PORTRAIT STEVE SCHOFIELD

**AGE** \_\_ 16

**PLAYS** \_\_ Jake Chambers, the teen hero of fantasy epic *The Dark Tower*, opposite Idris Elba's Gunslinger and Matthew McConaughey's The Man In Black. "Jake has visions of other worlds, he's bullied for it. [So] travelling to different worlds, it's like he belongs there."

**BACKSTORY** \_\_ "I'm one of seven [kids] and we all went to a theatre school on Saturdays to give my parents a break. An agent visited when I was about 11. I had to do some cheesy advert thing, but the buzz of doing weird stuff is what I like."

**EARLY ROLES** \_\_ "When I got a role in *Casualty* I was amazed; I was in that for a few minutes. Then [BBC Saxon epic] *The Last Kingdom* [where he played Young Uhtred] was my first big thing."

**THE BIG BREAK** \_\_ "*The Dark Tower*! I had eight auditions, over four months. My first audition, I read the sides and they said, 'Great. Can you do it in American now?' No-one told me I needed an accent! I hadn't read anything like it. I thought it would be all, like, fairies, but actually it's *sick*."

**NEXT UP** \_\_ "I have things in the pipeline, but they're on the down-low. I'd like to play something crazy. Obviously, I'm only starting, but the aspiration would be to play something meaty."

**ACTING MENTORS** \_\_ "It feels real when you watch Tom Hardy. I met him for something on *Taboo*, before this film opportunity came up and they very kindly let me off. I like Robert Carlyle and Paddy Considine as well."

**HOBBIES** \_\_ "I bought a few skateboards in South Africa, and I would skate around the set [of *The Dark Tower*]. I did get evils from the producers."

THE DARK TOWER IS IN CINEMAS FROM 18 AUGUST





Tom Taylor, photographed  
exclusively for *Empire*  
at the Aply Studios,  
London, on 14 July 2017.



STYLING: ABENA OFEL. GROOMING: ALEXIS DAY USING SKYN ICELAND AND WAHL. Navy and red jersey track top by Gucci at MatchesFashion (www.matchesfashion.com). White and blue T-shirt by Christopher Raeburn (shop.christopherraeburn.co.uk). Black denim jeans by APC at MatchesFashion (www.matchesfashion.com). Burgundy brogue 'Sacramento' boots by Weder Hodel Feder (www.wederhodelfeder.com).

# SINGLE BRIGHT FEMALE

Newcomer Emily Beecham takes  
centre stage as hard-living  
*Daphne* in the new Brit indie

WORDS IAN FREER

SOME FILMMAKERS GO after every demographic. For Peter Mackie Burns, director of UK indie *Daphne*, he was after "the mythical figure of a British woman going to the cinema and seeing her own life on screen". The ace in Burns' pocket is star Emily Beecham. Best known for a turn in the Coen brothers' *Hail, Caesar!*, her performance delivers that rare cinematic thing: a complex, contradictory, recognisable woman.

"We felt we related to things in the character you don't [often] see represented," she says. "You do in American indies like *Margaret* and *Obvious Child*, but not films set in Elephant And Castle."

Daphne is a chef, drinking, drugging and shagging her way around South London. She owns a pet snake (Scratch), reads philosophy (Zizek), and exercises a sharp tongue ("You, sir, are a glorious cunt"). Slowly, she re-evaluates her life after witnessing a violent incident. Really, though, it's a 31-year-old woman in an existential crisis in an uncaring metropolis. Beecham is winning, caustic, broken, but always real. "She is nothing like the character," says Burns. "She's very shy, doesn't swear. It's a real testament to her skill."

The character started life as 'Lucy' in Burns' 2014 short *Happy Birthday To Me*, also starring Beecham. The pair, with writer Nico Mensinga, developed the role with character reading lists,



**Top:** Emily Beecham  
as Daphne. **Middle:**  
With married boss Joe  
(Tom Vaughan-Lawlor).  
**Here:** Director Peter  
Mackie Burns.

playlists and a 200-page backstory. "I understand the feeling of being isolated in a city and wanting to connect but just settling because the city is such a big place," says Beecham. "She doesn't know what she wants from life and tells herself it doesn't bother her, but it does. She's a little bit lost."

With few exceptions, Daphne's sharp edges have cut deep with festival audiences. At South By Southwest it was met with rave reviews, while Edinburgh gave Beecham a Best Performance Award. "Everybody has parts of themselves which are likeable and unlikeable," she suggests. "Why does a character have to be like an angel?"

Given she has played her twice already, can Daphne's story continue? "I have no idea where she'd be in ten years' time," says Beecham. "She is Daphne. She is so unpredictable." But even if she is finished with Daphne for now, you get the sense Daphne isn't finished with her.

**DAPHNE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 29 SEPTEMBER**

**PREVIEW**



ON-SET  
EXCLUSIVE

## BORG VS MCENROE

OUT 22 SEPTEMBER

# ACES HIGH

Sex, Swedes, the '70s: why *Borg Vs McEnroe* could be a smash

WORDS IAN FREER

"THIS MOVIE IS not about a tennis match," says Shia LaBeouf, the 'McEnroe' of *Borg Vs McEnroe*. "I don't think the big reveal is who wins the match. That would be a shitty movie. Our big reveal is the human side of things: the smoke and mirrors of these men being heroes and villains."

The match LaBeouf refers to is the pair's classic 1980 Wimbledon final, but today's set-ups swap SW19 for West 54th Street. *Empire* has joined the production in the middle of a bacchanal. Outside it's Gothenburg, October 2016. Inside a sleek modern restaurant, it is Studio 54, 1977. Tennis superstar Björn Borg (Sverrir Gudnason) is being inducted into the legendary New York nightclub by fellow player Vitas Gerulaitis (Robert Emmet) and is taking in the sights: naked, gold-painted dancers on podiums, topless waiters, a fancy-dress angel straddling a devil, while refugees from *Saturday Night Fever* diligently disco-dance without music so dialogue can be recorded.

"We are in a moment in Björn's life when he is being exposed to the global jet-set life of the time," explains director Janus Metz Pedersen (*Armadillo*). "It is an exciting moment of parties and nudity and all that comes with the temptations of fame he was suddenly experiencing."

Borg's hedonism plays against the myth of the pair being opposites — McEnroe the 'fire'/brat, Borg the 'ice'/good guy. *Borg Vs McEnroe* posits the (base)lines were not so clear cut.

"They were very different personalities, but they were the only ones who could understand the other because they knew what it was like to be on top and how difficult it is," says Gudnason, sporting flares and a shirt with Concorde-like collars. "Even if they were different, they were also alike."

Although McEnroe is not in today's scene, LaBeouf is on set in cargo shorts and a red trucker cap. If the actor is a target for the paparazzi, he is clearly beloved by the crew, joshing around, hugging people, soaking up the party atmosphere. *Borg Vs McEnroe* is near the end of its shoot, but these easy vibes weren't always the case.

"We had a rivalry here on the set," LaBeouf admits of his relationship with Gudnason. "It was loving and friendly, but real. We didn't really hang out until after I wrapped. It wasn't the bad eye. It was closer to what Borg and McEnroe had." What goes on the Tour, stays on the Tour, it seems.



**Clockwise from above:** Emotional McEnroe (Shia LaBeouf) in despair as Borg (Sverrir Gudnason) remains impassive; Borg shows his secret steamy side in Studio 54; Director Janus Metz Pedersen (right) on set; "You cannot be serious!" LaBeouf embraces his inner J-Mac.











# NAKED ATTRACTION

Are Elio (Timothée Chalamet) and academic Oliver (Armie Hammer) in for a bumpy ride? Below: Love's young dreamer.

With his new period romance, director Luca Guadagnino and his cast let their inhibitions go

WORDS DAMON WISE

**TALKING ABOUT HIS** filmmaking process brings out Luca Guadagnino's inner Swiss Toni. Like *The Fast Show*'s resident lothario, a man who likened everything to making love to a beautiful woman, the *Call Me By Your Name* director turns sensuous when discussing his critically acclaimed romance. "My casting director recently said to me, 'Every movie you make, it's a way of making love to your partners in the film, whether they are actors or crew members,'" he explains. Yes, even the sweaty key grip was inducted into the Italian director's sexy filmmaking world.

This metaphorical on-set orgy was in aid of an indie drama critics have been showering with praise since its Sundance debut in January. Suffused with a heat-haze eroticism and nostalgic hues, and featuring some show-stopping (and potentially non-consensual) sex with a peach, it follows Armie Hammer's academic during a hot, lustful '70s Italian

summer. Timothée Chalamet (Young Coop in *Interstellar*) is the Italian-American teen, Elio Perlman, he falls for.

For Guadagnino, *Call Me By Your Name* follows *I Am Love* and *A Bigger Splash*, two equally lauded projects. He deems those two "very harsh and really strong films", confessing it was the idea of crafting a gentler, more idyllic tale that drew him to this adaptation of André Aciman's novel. "I did it for the pleasure of it," he says. "I said to everyone that we had to make it lightly. I wanted everyone to leave their inhibitions at the door — and I'm not talking about nudity, I'm talking about being emotionally naked. I wanted everyone to be open and loose."

That emotional nakedness allowed Guadagnino to get to the parts others struggle to reach. "The camera never fails to see the truth," he notes, "for good or for bad." His ambition, he expands, was to make *Call Me By Your Name* "in a simple, straightforward, very lighthearted and joyous way", avoiding "all of the complications that come with making a movie".

This unique filmmaking philosophy has paid dividends, especially for Hammer, whose revelatory central turn has drawn early Oscar buzz. Next to undergo Guadagnino's boot camp? The cast of *Suspria*, his big-budget remake of



Dario Argento's classic slasher. Then again, this creatively restless director may have an entirely new approach in mind for his first horror. "My goal when I was seven, shooting on Super-8, was to make horror movies," he remembers. "So probably *Suspria* will be my *real* debut." It'll be his second debut, maybe, but he definitely won't be losing his filmmaking virginity.

**CALL ME BY YOUR NAME IS IN CINEMAS FROM 27 OCTOBER**



## THE QUOTE QUOTA

The month's most notable  
TV and movie *bon mots*

"I AM CHOOSING BETWEEN  
TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS. DO  
STOP ADDING TO THEM."

WINSTON CHURCHILL (BRIAN COX)  
IN *CHURCHILL*



"WE'RE ABOUT TO CHANGE EVERYTHING  
WITH MY SHINY ANTENNA!"

K (STEVEN YEUN)  
IN *OKJA*



"SEEING HOME DOESN'T HELP US  
GET THERE."

COMMANDER BOLTON (KENNETH BRANAGH)  
IN *DUNKIRK*



"WHAT ARE YOU LOVELY SOUTHERN  
LADIES LEARNING TODAY — THE ART  
OF CASTRATION?"

CORPORAL JOHN McBURNEY (COLIN FARRELL)  
IN *THE BEQUILED*



"YOU KNOW WHO THEY ALWAYS KILL  
FIRST? LAWYERS."

COLONEL WILLIAM LENNOX (JOSH DUHAMEL)  
IN *TRANSFORMERS: THE LAST KNIGHT*



"DO YOU LAY EGGS?"

NED (JACOB BATALON)  
IN *SPIDER-MAN: HOMECOMING*



PREVIEW

## BACK FROM THE DEAD

No Pablo Escobar? No problem.  
*Narcos* Season 3 has new  
cocaine cowboys to fill the gap

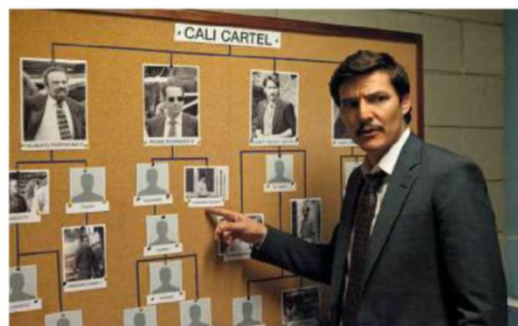
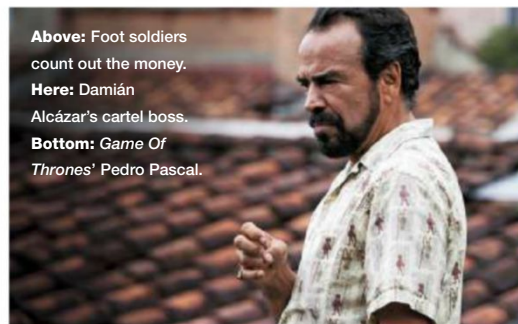
WORDS OLLY RICHARDS

THE TITLE *NARCOS* was chosen for a reason. The Netflix series, which drops its third season next month, was always intended to be about the rise of cocaine in Colombia and the kingpins — or 'narcos' — who controlled it. It was never meant to be about one person. That was proven at the end of Season 2 when drug baron Pablo Escobar (Wagner Moura), the show's central character, was killed off in a bloody execution. It shouldn't have come as a huge surprise to anyone who knew anything about the real-life Escobar, but it leaves the show with a big, baddie-shaped hole.

"When I conceived the show, years ago now," says executive producer Eric Newman, "I modelled it slightly like *The Wire*. You'd have characters die or just recede from the series, but the story of Baltimore would go on." Now that Escobar has permanently receded, new villains must come forth to take his place. To fill the Escobar void we'll get four. Three of them we've already met; one will be introduced very soon.

"The focus of this season is the rise of the Cali Cartel," says Newman. We've seen three of its leaders, Rodriguez brothers Miguel (Francisco Denis) and Gilberto (Damián Alcázar), and 'Pacho' Herrera (Alberto Ammann) in the last season. Soon, we'll see the fourth member Chepe Santacruz (Pepe Rapazote), who Newman simply describes as "amazing".

Above: Foot soldiers  
count out the money.  
Here: Damián  
Alcázar's cartel boss.  
Bottom: *Game Of  
Thrones'* Pedro Pascal.



"The Cali Cartel were instrumental in bringing down Escobar," says Newman. "I like to think of it as on the evolutionary scale, [with] Escobar as a single-cell organism. These guys are a more evolved organism." Where Escobar had what Newman calls "a Trumpian craving for approval" that drove him to reckless acts, the Cali Cartel were cool businessmen who "sought to be part of the establishment because they thought it could protect them".

Newman won't be drawn on whether the Cali Cartel story will carry on into the confirmed fourth season, but he says there are plenty of stories left to tell. "Drugs don't stop," he says. "It's got worse [in Mexico]... The seasons covering Escobar told only maybe a tenth of the story." Settle in for another 18 seasons, then.

**NARCOS SEASON 3 LAUNCHES ON NETFLIX ON  
1 SEPTEMBER**



# THE DON OF THE DEAD

**Empire's Chris Hewitt remembers George A. Romero, a horror legend who spawned a genre**

THERE WAS MORE to George A. Romero than zombies. A Romero triple-bill could avoid flesh-eating fiends and still take in the likes of psychological vampire thriller *Martin*, or modern Arthurian fable *Knightriders*, or the barminess of his Stephen King collaboration, *Creepshow*.

But zombies and Romero, who died in July after a short battle with cancer, will remain forever linked. When Edgar Wright and Simon Pegg pitched *Shaun Of The Dead* to Working Title, they called it "Richard Curtis shot through the head by George Romero". *The Walking Dead* and *Resident Evil* wouldn't exist if it hadn't been for the man who basically created the modern zombie with *Night Of The Living Dead* (1968), and refined it with gallons of gore in the pulpy *Dawn Of The Dead* (2004) and 1985's presciently pessimistic *Day Of The Dead*.

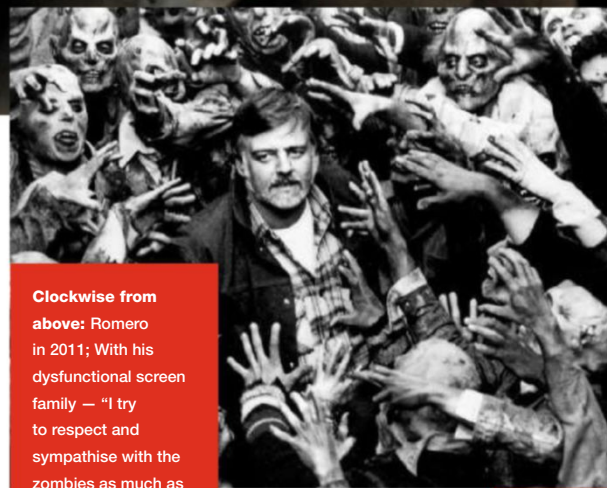
For a guy who made films about brainless hordes, though, brains were one thing Romero didn't lack. His movies were sly, subversive, satirical. They were progressive — the leads in his original zombie trilogy were black men (Duane

Jones, Ken Foree, Terry Alexander), and women (Judith O'Dea, Gaylen Ross, Lori Cardille). He was often ahead of his time.

He never had a great relationship with Hollywood, partly through sheer bad luck and that old independent sensibility that didn't work in the studio system. As a result, he spent too long in the wilderness, attached to pet projects that didn't get made (*The Stand*) or ended up with someone else (1999's *The Mummy*, 2002's original *Resident Evil*).

His return from the cold in 2005 was a result, ironically, of the revival led by *Shaun Of The Dead* and Zack Snyder's remake of *Dawn Of The Dead*. Romero turned back to zombies with *Land Of The Dead*. The movie didn't catch fire commercially, but the director — happily relocated to Toronto from his former Pittsburgh base — stayed with the genre for his last two movies, *Diary Of The Dead* and *Survival Of The Dead*. And while this second trilogy failed to match the first, he still had plenty of piss and vinegar. And his legacy and impact remained undiminished.

Romero was always self-deprecating about his successes, either unable or unwilling to face up to his huge cultural footprint. He also had a wicked sense of humour that shone through in his films. In 2005, while discussing *Land Of The Dead*, *Empire* asked him when this sudden zombie fever might end. "I guess, when I die," he smiled. "I don't know. I might come back." We'd be just fine with that.



**Clockwise from above:** Romero in 2011; With his dysfunctional screen family — "I try to respect and sympathise with the zombies as much as possible"; And his 2005 comeback, *Land Of The Dead*.





# THE ACTORS' ACTOR

Remembering Martin Landau, Ed Wood Oscar-winner and drama teacher to the greats

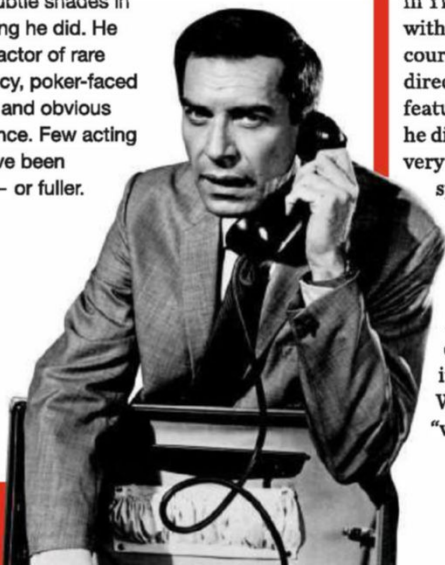
WORDS IAN NATHAN

RECEIVING HIS BEST Supporting Actor Oscar for *Ed Wood*, Martin Landau (1928-2017) thanked his director Tim Burton for giving him "the part of my life". Having trained at the Method-orientated Actors Studio alongside Steve McQueen (he later taught Jack Nicholson and Anjelica Huston there), Landau went deep to play Béla Lugosi, caning 35 of the washed-up horror great's movies to catch the tragicomic desperation of a man addicted to both morphine and his own legend. It was a high-water mark for both actor and director.

Landau's career hit its stride with Hitchcock's *North By Northwest*, humanising a sadistic heavy by adding a waft of homoerotic attraction toward spymaster James Mason. Television would bring him fame. He turned down Spock, but embodied the deadpan Cold War fun of *Mission: Impossible*, marrying co-star Barbara Bain. They'd pair up again in Gerry Anderson's cult sci-fi *Space: 1999*.

Age would bring deserved recognition. At 60, he picked up the first of three Oscar nods in Francis Ford Coppola's *Tucker: The Man And His Dreams*. Summoning his dark side to play a homicidal ophthalmologist in *Crimes And Misdemeanors* for his second, his calculating air landed to perfection. Following his win for *Ed Wood*, he worked alongside Al Pacino and Harrison Ford, and reunited with Burton for *Sleepy Hollow* and *Frankenweenie*. His fierce dedication to his craft never waned.

Landau called his late success "a gift", but in seven decades in the business he found subtle shades in everything he did. He was an actor of rare poignancy, poker-faced humour and obvious intelligence. Few acting lives have been longer — or fuller.



Street hassle: Menashe Lustig with on-screen offspring Rieven (Ruben Niborski).

## LANGUAGE BARRIER

Shooting Yiddish father-and-son drama *Menashe* set its maker an unusual challenge

WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN

**BEST KNOWN AS** the birthplace of Woody Allen and Lena Dunham's *Girls*, Brooklyn is now the setting for the year's most unlikely foreign-language film, too. Shot almost entirely in Yiddish and filmed in a quiet enclave nestled within America's busiest metropolis over the course of a year, *Menashe* was a bold place for director Joshua Z. Weinstein to kick off his feature filmmaking career — not least because he didn't even speak the language. "I speak very, very little," the New Yorker admits. "I grew up speaking Hebrew, but if Hebrew is like Arabic, then Yiddish is German."

Fortunately, it was his words the cast were speaking. Set in the Hasidic Jewish New York enclave of Borough Park, *Menashe* began life as 30 pages of loosely connected scenes in English. "By the end, it became a full-on regular script," explains Weinstein of his Mike Leigh-like approach, "which [co-writers Alex Lipschultz and Musa

Syeed] and I translated into Yiddish for the actors." Not only had most of his cast not acted in movies before, many of them hadn't even seen any. "[They] thought big emotion was what you should do in a movie," he says. "[I worked] with them to be smaller and more minimalist, because their faces, their bodies, said so much."

The film, picked up by *Moonlight* distributor A24 at Sundance but ineligible for a Best Foreign Language nod (the Academy's contentious rules mean only films shot outside the US are eligible), is based loosely on the life of its star, little-known Hasidic comic Menashe Lustig. A big man with a big heart hampered by a knack for epic blundering, Menashe fights for custody of his son (played on screen by Ruben Niborski) with his local Jewish elders, who believe the boy would be better off with his uncle's family. The result, like a low-fi splicing of *Kramer Vs. Kramer* and *Bicycle Thieves*, isn't strictly autobiographical, but it's "100 per cent [Lustig's] emotional truth", notes the director. "He told me early on that his wife had died and he'd lost custody of his son."

If there was one slight downside to working with *Menashe*'s game but inexperienced cast, it was in their surprisingly meticulous approach to their dialogue. "It was this Talmudic [scenario] on set, where the actors would literally debate the merits of each word," laughs Weinstein. "It was hysterical... well, it was maddening to witness. I'd be, like, 'Let's get back to work!'"

Did he ever feel like *A Serious Man*'s put-upon Jewish professor, Larry Gopnik, on set? He laughs. "Every day. Every. Day."

**MENASHE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 8 SEPTEMBER**



# HOW MUCH IS A PINT OF MILK?

DAVE BAUTISTA

Drax The Destroyer's curds are famously huge

WORDS OLLY RICHARDS



## How much is a pint of milk?

I drink almond milk and flax milk, which I buy by the quart, and that's about five bucks, I think. Am I being conned? Oh man.

## Do you have a nickname?

My nickname since I was a kid has been DJ, because I'm David Junior. My family still calls me that.

## Do you have a signature dish?

It's a Filipino dish called adobo, which I make with chicken. I've made it for people like James Gunn and the *Guardians* cast. I love to cook.

## When were you most starstruck?

I think it was actually Ryan Gosling [on *Blade Runner 2049*]. It was one of those things where you don't realise quite how big a fan you are until you meet them. I couldn't stop hugging him.

## What is the worst smell in the world?

Hockey locker rooms. I smelled a lot in my years as a wrestler, because we'd be fighting in places also used by hockey teams. It is a wretched smell.

## When were you last naked outdoors?

I only really do that when I'm home and I haven't

been home in a while. To get to some parts of my house requires going outside and I don't tend to get dressed for it.

## What character were you in your first-ever school play?

I've never done one! I was way too shy.

## Have you ever written fan mail to anyone?

I sent an email to Pierce Brosnan after I worked with him on a film in London [*Final Score*]. I'm a huge fan, but I thought it might be weird to tell him that before we started shooting. So I wrote him a little love letter afterwards.

## From one to ten, how hairy is your arse?

I was just discussing my butt hair with my wife last night. When I play Drax [in *Guardians Of The Galaxy*], I take off all the make-up in a sauna and it runs into my butt crack. Some of it will get stuck in my butt hair, so the less hair I have the better. Fortunately, I'd say that on the scale I'm about a three or four. I don't have a thick coating of fur.

## Which movie have you seen the most?

A lot of those ones from the late '70s — *Star Wars*, *Jaws*, *Close Encounters*. Actually, the one I've seen most is probably *The Godfather*.

## Whose poster was on your wall as a kid?

When I was a teenager I had a huge Led Zeppelin poster on the wall, the kind you would shine a black light on.

## Do you have any scars?

I have a bunch, obviously. Two on the bridge of my nose, in a criss-cross, which I think people just think is a wrinkle. I got kicked and elbowed in the head.

## What's the worst thing you've ever put in your mouth?

Durian fruit. It tastes like rotten onions. People say it smells horrible but tastes nice, and they are wrong. That stayed with me for days.

## What's the strangest place you've ever thrown up?

In a janitor's closet. In fact, in a mop bucket. I ate too much before a wrestling match and then afterwards I was scrambling around for somewhere to throw up. That seemed the best option.

**BUSHWICK IS IN CINEMAS FROM 25 AUGUST AND AVAILABLE FOR DOWNLOAD AND ON VOD FROM 28 AUGUST**





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# 10 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

## TIN STAR

The inside information on Sky Atlantic's star-studded new revenge thriller

- 1 *Tin Star* is the latest Sky Original production, offering a blend of revenge thriller and psychological drama that is set to bake your noodle. In a good way.
- 2 It stars the wonderful Tim Roth as Jim Worth, a British cop who gets drawn into the investigation of his life in his new Canadian home.
- 3 That new home is an idyllic community in the Rocky Mountains — idyllic, that is, on the outside. Filmed in the beautiful

environs of Calgary, High River and Bragg Creek, Alberta, Sky Atlantic has created a stunningly cinematic piece of television.

- 4 When Jim, as the new sheriff, takes a stand against the crime wave that hits the town, an assassination attempt on his life takes place. He survives, but it claims someone close to him, sending him on the path of vengeance.

- 5 Driven by guilt and grief, Jim wrestles with his inner self, struggling with the twin impulses of doing the right thing and the desire to wreak bloody revenge. Which side of his personality will win?

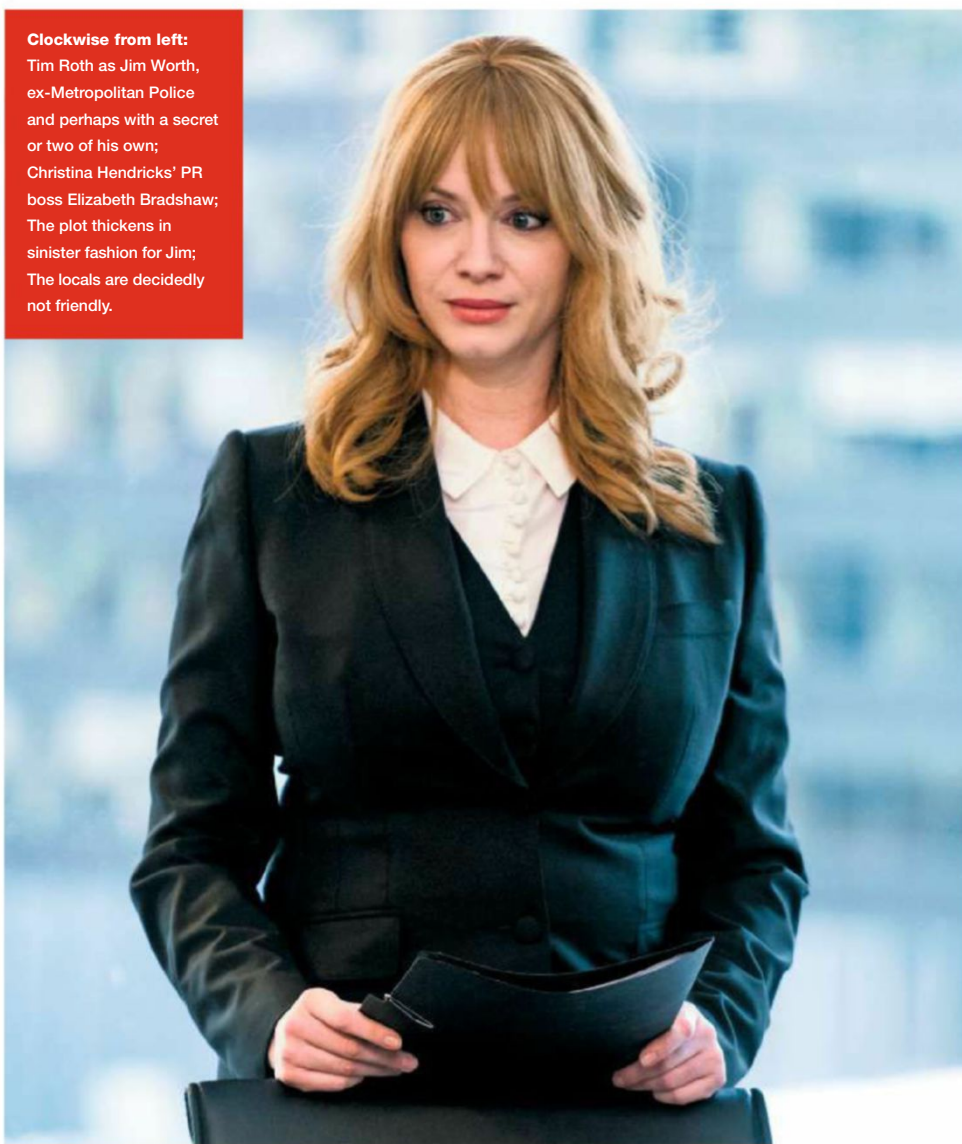
- 6 The show also stars *Mad Men*'s Christina Hendricks as key player Elizabeth Bradshaw, the sinister PR boss of local oil company North Stream Oil.







**Clockwise from left:**  
Tim Roth as Jim Worth,  
ex-Metropolitan Police  
and perhaps with a secret  
or two of his own;  
Christina Hendricks' PR  
boss Elizabeth Bradshaw;  
The plot thickens in  
sinister fashion for Jim;  
The locals are decidedly  
not friendly.



**7** The first episode opens with a shocking scene that will have you gripped from the start. We won't give away any spoilers, but it's guaranteed to get your heart racing.

**8** Genevieve O'Reilly — most recently seen as Mon Mothma in *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* — plays Jim's wife, Angela.

**9** All ten episodes are written by Rowan Joffe, the director of the recent *Brighton Rock* remake and *Before I Go To Sleep*.

**10** You can catch this must-see show on TV from 7 September, but if you're the type who likes to binge-watch, fear not — all episodes will be available from the same date. Hurrah!

**TIN STAR IS ON SKY ATLANTIC FROM 7 SEPTEMBER**



# ON.SCREEN

REVIEWS OF NEW FILMS, SHOWS AND GAMES ON EVERY SIZE OF SCREEN

★★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★★★ GOOD ★★★ OKAY ★★ POOR ★ AWFUL

EDITED BY JONATHAN PILE

## CINEMA

### DETROIT

★★★★★

OUT 25 AUGUST  
CERT 15 / 143 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Kathryn Bigelow

**CAST** John Boyega, Algee Smith, Anthony Mackie, Will Poulter, Jason Mitchell, John Krasinski, Jack Reynor, Hannah Murray, Kaitlyn Dever

**PLOT** Detroit, Michigan, 1967. In the heat of the infamous 12th Street uprising, a task-force, led by racist cop Philip Krauss (Poulter), raids the Algiers Motel searching for a sniper. When they fail to find him, the mostly African-American guests are subjected to a horrifying storm of hatred and violence that spills into murder.

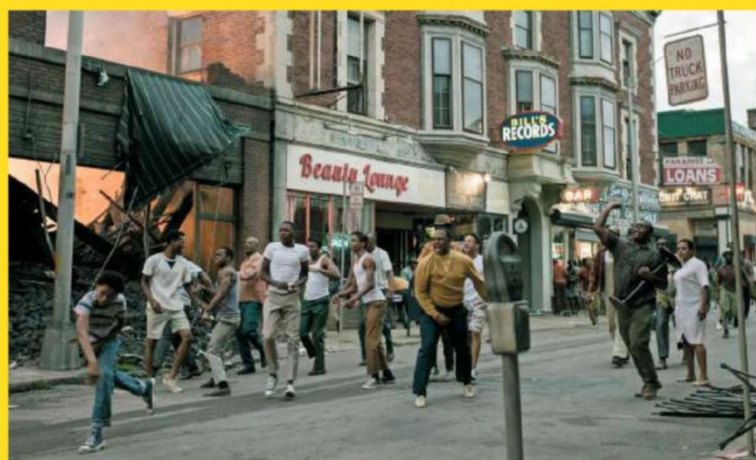
**FORTY-THREE DEAD**, 1,200 injured, 7,000 arrested, 2,000 buildings scorched. It's easy to get lost in the shattering scale of the Detroit riots. Over five days in 1967, the Summer Of Love exploded into hate as the civil rights movement tipped into civil war. Powered by centuries of white oppression, the African-American uprising left Motor City a burnt-out, smoking husk.

Kathryn Bigelow's eviscerating epic, her first since *Zero Dark Thirty*, warrants a subtitle: 'The Anatomy Of A Riot'. Bigelow is a master of time-bomb cinema and its portentous, tick-tocking rhythms, but *Detroit* detonates from the opening reel. After a clatter of archive news footage, you're plunged into a combustible recreation of a cop raid on a speakeasy — the flashpoint that fuelled the revolt. As looting breaks out and the tanks are rolled in, Bigelow sets her cast on a collision course: Will Poulter's callous cop, introduced shooting a rioter in the back as if he's out hunting

game; Algee Smith's Larry Reed, lead singer in Motown soul group The Dramatics; and John Boyega's private security guard, Melvin Dismukes.

The riot is into its third day when the three converge at the Algiers Motel — a refuge from the violence that, in a hideous twist of irony, became the backdrop to a massacre. Alerted by a gunshot (actually a prank with a starter pistol), the Detroit Police and the National Guard Swiss-cheese the motel with bullets, then move in to raid the building. As the innocent suspects are rounded up, what starts out as an interrogation rapidly descends into a kangaroo court — Krauss (Poulter) as judge and jury, and fellow cop Demens (Reynor) as his compliant accomplice. By the end of the night, three of the guests will be dead, nine will have been assaulted and the cops will saunter out as if nothing ever happened. Recreated in unflinching real-time, *Detroit's* sustained sense-attack will be talked about for years, if not decades,





**Clockwise from left:** Will Poulter's Krauss pins innocent Fred (Jacob Latimore) against the wall; John Boyega's wary security guard Melvin Dismukes; 12th Street rioting; Kaitlyn Dever as Karen, realising the refuge at the Algiers Motel is anything but.

to come — an hour-long endurance so physical you experience it in the pit of your stomach.

This has to be the closest Bigelow's come to pure horror since *Near Dark*, but even that comparison's left wanting. *Near Dark* was fantasy — the horror of *Detroit* has the sickening flash of reality, its true events backed up by Mark Boal's tenaciously researched screenplay. Bigelow is too cool-eyed to be blinded by sentiment or shock-tactics — she restages the Algiers Motel Incident as a compacted microcosm of the era's race-hate, powered by full-force performances. Boyega's security guard is a classic Bigelow character — a rigid professional compromised by fate and wedged in an impossible position: the locals see him as in cahoots with the powers-that-be; the cops see him as a second-class citizen. Boyega's in prime form here, while Poulter's casting as Detroit's dictatorial cop is a masterstroke: that boyish face masking a cold, crusading bigot who, in

the film's most chilling moment of dehumanising disgrace, declares the death-raid as just a game.

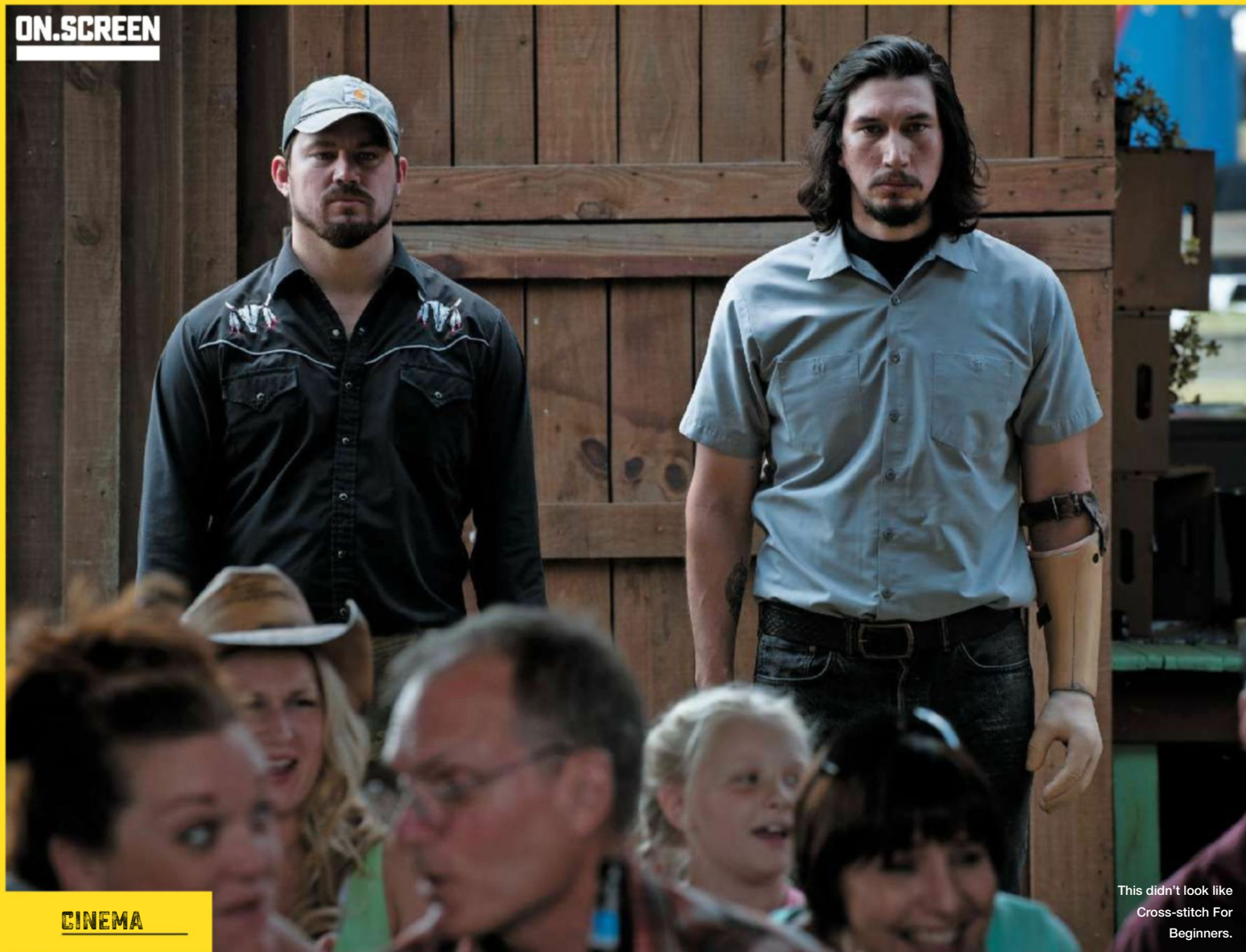
After its breath-stealing centrepiece, *Detroit*'s third act feels like a slow, rasping exhale. There is, inevitably, a leaking out of *Detroit*'s intensity, as if you've entered a decompression chamber, but the trauma lingers like toxic gas. Bigelow closes out the film with a genre-switch to courtroom drama as the cops and Dismukes are held to account in an all-white court with an all-white jury with a whitewash conclusion — an extended aftershock of institutional bias that offers no closure, no comfort and a devastating coda for Algee Smith's traumatised survivor. The Academy is notoriously wary when it comes to incendiary content, but if *Detroit* does become an Awards player, Smith's performance deserves to be honoured above all others.

As with *Zero Dark Thirty*, *Detroit* has a clean, raw look, its lucid colour palette intensifying

the clarity of Bigelow's vision. A lot of the shots, especially during its early riot sequences, feel stolen rather than staged, charged up by visceral, smash-and-grab camerawork (the film is vividly lensed by Paul Greengrass' handheld warrior of choice, Barry Ackroyd). It's a technique that turns the passive viewer into an active witness, but let's remember: this film is for the fallen, then and now. It's for Michael Brown in Ferguson, Eric Garner in New York, Ezell Ford in LA, Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Dontre Hamilton in Milwaukee and countless other victims who've lost their lives to establishment prejudice. Black lives matter, but some deaths echo louder than most. Wake up, says *Detroit*. Wake up. **SIMON CROOK**

**VERDICT** A gruelling, nightmarish, ferociously vivid riot epic that recreates one of the darkest chapters in American history. Unflinching, unmissable and terrifyingly pertinent.





This didn't look like  
Cross-stitch For  
Beginners.

CINEMA

## LOGAN LUCKY

★★★★★

OUT 25 AUGUST  
CERT TBC / 119 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Steven Soderbergh

**CAST** Channing Tatum, Adam Driver, Daniel Craig, Katherine Waterston, Sebastian Stan, Seth MacFarlane

**PLOT** West Virginia miner Jimmy Logan (Tatum) loses his job; desperate, he enlists his brother Clyde (Driver) to plan a robbery on the Coca-Cola 600, one of the biggest NASCAR races of the year.

**DID ANYBODY REALLY** believe Steven Soderbergh was retired? Certainly not people who watched *The Knick*, which was more 'cinematic' than most theatrically released films. And now the pioneer of '90s indies makes a welcome return to theatres with this well-acted, slickly directed, if somewhat familiar redneck heist flick — and after last year's dull *Masterminds*, Lord knows we needed a good one.

Channing Tatum is on loveable beefcake duty once again, this time as a West Virginia miner

with a surprisingly convincing accent. As things go in these films, once laid off for the proverbial pre-existing condition, he promptly decides to rob the local NASCAR track's biggest day of the year. He enlists the usual band of misfits, including his brother played, in a piece of casting that stretches familial-likeness credulity, by Adam Driver. Nevertheless, the two have cracking chemistry, and Driver's slow-talking but sharp-witted barman, who lost an arm in Iraq, would be *Logan Lucky*'s standout performance, were it not for the presence of one Daniel Craig.

Playing a boiled egg-loving con with bleached-blond hair and lashings of explosives expertise, those blue eyes of his — so cold as Bond — are here bulging with lunacy. He's hilarious and totally convincing as someone far from the officer-class stylings of his day job; it's a pleasure to be reminded of what a good character actor Craig can be. Throw in some would-be computer hackers and the team is complete. Now, what about the plan?

Heist films are all about the process, so it would be a crime to give too much away, suffice to say that Soderbergh and writer Rebecca Blunt are careful to dole out enough info to make sure we can follow what's going on, but are equally careful to keep a few surprises to drop along the way.

If this is all sounding a little *Out Of Sight*

getting it on with the *Ocean's* trilogy and their baby growing up in Trump country, that's because it is. There's an unavoidable feeling that Soderbergh is playing the hits here — although it's odd how much a character-driven crime flick is now such a rarity it feels like an exercise in turn-of-the-millennium retro.

More irritatingly, as with a lot of Soderbergh (*Side Effects*, *The Good German*), there's the lingering suspicion we're another draft or so away from something special, but his frenetic working pace didn't allow for it. Seth MacFarlane certainly wasn't given enough time to perfect his 'English' accent. But a late-entering Hilary Swank as an FBI agent (with *Blue Ruin*'s Macon Blair on sidekick duty) goes nowhere, as does an extended cameo from Katherine Waterston, who shows up to make a sledgehammer point about the US healthcare system only to disappear once she's done so. And while not everything has to have a bow on it, *Logan Lucky* doesn't quite have the impactful ending the build-up deserves. But it's such an enjoyable ride to get there, that can be forgiven. **ANDREW LOWRY**

**VERDICT** Even if it needed one last push to make it truly exceptional, there's a lot to enjoy here. And Soderbergh once again attracts a cast it's a pleasure to spend time with.





## ANNABELLE: CREATION

★★★

OUT 11 AUGUST / CERT 15 / 109 MINS

**DIRECTOR** David F. Sandberg

**CAST** Stephanie Sigman, Anthony LaPaglia, Mirando Otto, Talitha Bateman

THE LATEST ENTRY in what is fast becoming more scared universe than shared universe, *Annabelle: Creation* is a prequel to a prequel (a preprequel?), telling the tale of how creepy demon doll Annabelle, first glimpsed in *The Conjuring*, came to be. By this point, you'd expect the law of diminishing returns to have kicked in, but director David F. Sandberg, coming on leaps and bounds from *Lights Out*, skilfully sets up and delivers plenty of scares. The plot, which sees a group of orphaned children go to live with Anthony LaPaglia's mysterious toymaker and his disfigured wife (Otto), perhaps has too many characters to track, and there's an over-reliance on loud noises, but this is a solid and at times surprising horror. **CH**



## HOTEL SALVATION

★★★★

OUT 25 AUGUST / CERT PG / 102 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Shubhashish Bhutiani

**CAST** Adil Hussain, Lalit Behl, Geetanjali Kulkarni, Palomi Ghosh

THE HOLY GANGES city of Varanasi is full of rooming houses where the faithful go to die and 25-year-old Shubhashish Bhutiani makes an impressive directorial debut in following an ailing seventysomething and his strait-laced accountant son on a farewell pilgrimage. Touching on a range of social issues without lecturing and lacing the gently meandering action with moments of offbeat humour and warm intimacy, Bhutiani deftly captures the atmosphere of the setting and the emotions experienced by Rajiv (Hussain), as he cops flack from his wife, daughter and boss in trying to do the right thing by the miraculously rejuvenated and often unappreciative father (Behl). A simple story beautifully told. **DP**



CINEMA

## FINAL PORTRAIT

★★★★★

OUT 18 AUGUST

CERT 15 / 90 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Stanley Tucci

**CAST** Geoffrey Rush, Armie Hammer, Clémence Poésy

**PLOT** Early 1960s, France: American writer James Lord (Hammer) agrees to sit for a portrait for Alberto Giacometti (Rush). What begins as a straightforward portrait session stretches out to day after day of fruitless work as the mercurial Giacometti struggles to finish the painting.

MOVIES ABOUT ARTISTS can be a dicey proposition. Sometimes they work — *Love Is The Devil* gives you insights into Francis Bacon no academic text could — but more often you get Anthony Hopkins bellowing his way through *Surviving Picasso*. Maybe there's something about drawing too direct a line from the work to the artist that feels reductive on film. Tellingly, John Maybury's Bacon-opic couldn't show any of the paintings, so was forced to be creative.

*Final Portrait* elegantly dodges the 'life plus trauma plus easel equals art' trap by looking at French painter Alberto Giacometti (Rush) through specs that are anything but rose-tinted, and by focusing on the creation of one painting, the actual content of which is incidental. Instead, Stanley Tucci — here directing for the fifth time — brings an actor's understanding of creative insecurity to this biopic, Giacometti constantly disparaging his own talent, wiping out days' worth of work to start again and burning his old drawings.

Instead of some idealised view of art as some mystical alchemy, Tucci is far more interested in the conditions that lead to creativity, and the personality that creates them. This version of Giacometti lives in a kind of barely organised chaos, neglecting his wife (a subtle Sylvie Testud) while openly doting on his prostitute lover (Poésy, so vivacious here she would have

*Nouvelle Vague* directors chewing their *chapeaux*).

On some level, he seems to know that satisfaction and contentment are the enemies of art; this isn't some silly Silicon Valley view of creativity as play, but neither is it about some notion of art as therapy. Giacometti burns happiness and contentment as fuel for his work, and the subtle ways he consciously or unconsciously structures his environment for his art to flourish at the expense of those around him are fascinating. Only Tony Shalhoub's Diego, Giacometti's assistant and brother, seems to get it, as he constantly hangs in the background with a wry smile at his brother's self-flagellation, happy to manipulate him when the time comes.

As Giacometti's model, trapped in an endless loop of aborted portraits and postponed flights, Hammer does good work with a thin role, his syrupy voice and natural WASP-ishness filling gaps the script doesn't. Geoffrey Rush's flair for dissolution is well-used in the lead role, nailing Giacometti's near apathy to anything that's not work or booze, and delivering a near-silent opening that's as tense as any thriller. Hammer arrives for his close-up, and a grumbling, shuffling Rush shambles through his studio in a series of audaciously extended long takes. It's the kind of drawn-out opening you get in the theatre, confidently drawing you in — you can almost feel Tucci's years of treading the boards.

His direction elsewhere, mostly constrained to an amazingly detailed recreation of Giacometti's studio, is as alert to performance as you'd expect. Essentially an extended two-hander, this manages to feel at once theatrical in its unhurried contentment to just let two strong actors bounce off each other, but also cinematic in Tucci and DP Danny Cohen's elegant camerawork — a pretty rare combo. The net result is a mature and wise drama about the cost and benefits of creativity. Tucci should spend more time behind the camera. **ANDREW LOWRY**

**VERDICT** Sensibly dramatising a few representative days rather than Giacometti's whole life, this may seem slight, but there's a lot to dig into here — and Rush hasn't had a showcase this good in years.





MI6 agent Lorraine Broughton (Charlize Theron) takes out the bad guys.

CINEMA

## ATOMIC BLONDE

★★★★

OUT NOW  
CERT 15 / 115 MINS

**DIRECTOR** David Leitch

**CAST** Charlize Theron, James McAvoy, John Goodman, Sofia Boutella, Toby Jones, Eddie Marsan, Bill Skarsgård

**PLOT** Lorraine Broughton (Theron) is an MI6 agent sent to Berlin to recover a lost list of secret agents. But with the Cold War coming to an end, both sides want the list so they can control the post-conflict future.

**PERHAPS WE SHOULD** be worried, geo-politically speaking, by the resurgence of Cold War themes and tropes. Are filmmakers sensing the growing political tension, or just tapping a nifty, paranoid aesthetic? *Atomic Blonde* thankfully leans to the latter — that it's about style not substance. Cool is prioritised over cunning as Charlize Theron's secret agent cuts a swathe through Cold War Germany.

Theron's Lorraine Broughton is an MI6

agent sent to Berlin just before the Wall falls, where the murder of a fellow agent and a lost list of spies threatens to extend hostilities. Broughton must find the murderer and recover the list, with the help of MI6 station chief David Percival (McAvoy).

From the off, Broughton's at a disadvantage. The terrain is unfamiliar, and the KGB are waiting for her before the plane even lands. That may be her own fault: in spike heels and rock-chic clothing she's the least convincing lawyer since Dr Gonzo in *Fear And Loathing In Las Vegas*. Her contact, Percival, is charmingly unreliable and operating his own agenda. And Berlin's tangle of national rivalries further complicates things, especially with a double agent on the loose and third and fourth parties also searching for the list (a MacGuffin shared with *Skyfall* and *Mission: Impossible*).

It's best not to study the plot too closely — start pulling threads and almost everyone's motivation falls apart. And Broughton doesn't invite empathy. Eyes hidden behind a succession of great sunglasses, she's explicitly painted as an ice queen, regularly dousing herself in medicinal ice baths, her cigarettes a rare sign of warmth. Yet Lorraine is not a John Wick-alike unstoppable force or a Bond-ian pillar of the establishment, instead skewing closer to Indiana

Jones — desperately battling bigger rivals.

As you'd expect from the co-director of *John Wick*, the stunts are breathtaking, with one brutal fight shot in long, hand-held takes that roam down stairs, through an apartment and into a car chase. And while it's not a first to see a woman battered about to this extent on screen, it *is* unusual. Most of Lorraine's opponents are male, and none hold back. It would be deeply disturbing were it almost anyone but Theron; she projects such formidable badassitude that it does not for a moment read like victimisation. Broughton uses whatever is to hand, and leverages her enemies' own momentum against them, so you believe she could hold her own.

This all feels like a Bond ambition tour for director David Leitch. As such, it's a convincing calling card. But this is edgier and more brutal than any Bond film. It's more fun than Eon's recent output, too — music choices leavening the violent threat and high stakes. Most of all, you'll struggle to take your eyes off Theron as she earns a place beside Bourne, Hunt and the rest. **HELEN O'HARA**

**VERDICT** It's cool and brutal, but with such impressive action credentials you almost wish there were fewer plot devices to distract you as Charlize gets up and at 'em.



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Less is more:  
farmer's son Johnny  
(Josh O'Connor)  
meets Gheorghe  
(Alec Secareanu).

## CINEMA

## GOD'S OWN COUNTRY



OUT 1 SEPTEMBER  
CERT TBC / 104 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Francis Lee

**CAST** Josh O'Connor, Alec Secareanu, Gemma Jones, Ian Hart

**PLOT** Johnny (O'Connor), the twentysomething son of an ailing sheep farmer (Hart), doesn't expect much from his life in rural Yorkshire beyond several pints and an anonymous bunk-up. But his perfunctory existence is turned upside-down when Romanian farmhand Gheorghe (Secareanu) arrives for lambing season.

IN HIS POEM *Moors*, Ted Hughes describes that particular part of the Yorkshire landscape as "a stage for the performance of heaven". It is *this* Yorkshire, brutal and beautiful, that Francis Lee conjures for his lyrical debut, *God's Own Country*.

The film opens on the moors before dawn: an isolated house, silence, then the sound of retching and spitting as farmer's son Johnny (O'Connor) vomits up beer from the night before.

The starkness of Johnny's daily life is sketched quickly as he rattles through the basic functions he strings together to make a life: he pukes, eats, pisses, grafts, screws, drinks, sleeps. He sweeps the floor, downs a shot, swallows meat without breathing, has wordless sex in the back of a trailer. His human interaction — casual shagging aside — is limited to stilted chat with an old friend and barked orders and muttered disappointments from his disabled father (Hart) and stern grandmother (Jones). It's an existence, barely. And a bleakness that O'Connor powerfully articulates with slight dialogue and subtle physical cues.

The few moments of tenderness are found in nature, with his animals — Johnny's shoulders sag as he strokes their flanks, whispers softly in their ears. Hughes once wrote he "made the association, somehow, between the world of animals and the 'real thing' in human beings", and Lee ruminates on this absence of ego, with Johnny able to be his true self in these fleeting moments.

Johnny's rescue, though he doesn't know he needs it, is in the form of Romanian Gheorghe (Alec Secareanu), who comes to work on the farm for a week. Overnight, Gheorghe introduces warmth to Johnny's world (and those around him). He makes him taste and touch, breathe and *feel*. He kisses him softly. He places daffodils on the dining table. When a runt is born, Gheorghe pulls mucus

from its mouth, breathing it back to life while Johnny looks on, the scene utterly foreign.

To compare this film to *Brokeback Mountain* is to be entirely reductive and deny *God's Own Country* the credit it so deserves. This is a full-throated, full-hearted gay love story. What it isn't, necessarily, is a film that explores the politics of gay relationships or the politics of oppression. The fight is not with the exterior world (the bigotry on display is actually Brexit-Britain xenophobia), but the interior world. And it's in this clattering clash of Johnny's old reality and the new one opening before him where O'Connor is truly exceptional — "I don't want to be a fuck-up anymore," he says, a simple sentiment that becomes utterly devastating in his mouth.

Ultimately, it's about the transformative power of love. Not simply between Johnny and Gheorghe, but Johnny and his family (the scenes with Ian Hart are beautifully observed).

It's a stunning debut from Lee, who confidently eschews high drama and seismic change writ large in favour of delicately drawn shifts that carefully, quietly devastate the heart. **TERRI WHITE**

**VERDICT** A dig into the nature of humanity from a director already fluent in the language of brutality and tenderness. A stunning love story that in its finest moments is pure poetry.





## THE ODYSSEY

★★★

OUT 18 AUGUST / CERT PG / 118 MINS

DIRECTOR Jérôme Salle

CAST Lambert Wilson, Pierre Niney, Audrey Tautou, Laurent Lucas

REMINISCENT OF JOACHIM Rønning and Espen Sandberg's dramatisation of Thor Heyerdahl's epic sea journey, *Kon-Tiki* (2012), this account of Jacques-Yves Cousteau's rise from 1940s French naval officer to 1960s superstar oceanographer is full of glorious underwater sequences, but lacking in dramatic depth. Much of the emphasis falls on his struggle to fund the expeditions for the various film and TV projects that caused Cousteau (Wilson) to alienate his wife, Simone (Tautou), and their second son, Philippe (Niney). The performances rise above the threadbare characterisation but while it has its gripping moments, most viewers will find themselves having to resort to the internet to fill in the many biographical gaps. **DP**



## EAT LOCALS

★

OUT 1 SEPTEMBER / CERT 15 / 90 MINS

DIRECTOR Jason Fletmyng

CAST Charlie Cox, Annette Crosbie, Dexter Fletcher, Freema Agyeman, Eve Myles, Tony Curran, Mackenzie Crook

JASON FLETMYNG IS a cracking actor, but on the strength of this, his debut as director, he's unlikely to make a career change. A gagless comedy-horror that awkwardly blends *What We Do In The Shadows* with *Zulu*, this neglects to include either laughs or scares, and awkwardly quotes everything from *Crocodile Dundee* to *Terminator 2* to *Lock, Stock And Two Smoking Barrels* — which Fletmyng was in. A solid cast — Charlie Cox, Dexter Fletcher, Freema Agyeman — likely had fun making it, but that's all they have to show for what feels as though it must have been a favour for a friend. Vampires live forever, but you won't spend your precious time watching something else. **AL**



## CINEMA

## THE HITMAN'S BODYGUARD

★★

OUT 18 AUGUST

CERT 15 / 118 MINS

DIRECTOR Patrick Hughes

CAST Ryan Reynolds, Samuel L. Jackson, Salma Hayek, Gary Oldman

**PLOT** Disgraced "protection agent" Michael Bryce (Reynolds) is coerced into transporting assassin Darius Kincaid (Jackson) to The Hague to testify against an evil dictator (Oldman).

**TIYPIFIED BY THE** work of Shane Black, the buddy action comedy was a Hollywood staple in the '80s and '90s, partly because on each occasion the audience knew *exactly* what they were going to get: a mismatched couple (often one conventional, one rule-breaker; sometimes one black, one white), pitched together to take down a Big Bad, crack wise and teach each other some life lessons along the way. This was all seasoned with car crashes, punishing punch-ups and the obligatory jump off a tall building with no chance of survival. That the model fell out of favour is partly down to an audience drawn away from star power to super-powers, but more pertinently, to the fact that eventually everyone had learned the beats and arcs backwards. Familiarity didn't breed contempt; it sired apathy.

Given its absence from the screen, the idea of bringing back the buddy action comedy feels both nostalgic and refreshing in its simplicity. Unfortunately, *The Hitman's Bodyguard* isn't the bullet-ridden vehicle to do it. On paper the ingredients seem perfect: Tom O'Connor's script was on the 2011 Black List of the hottest unproduced screenplays and the casting — the slick persona of Ryan Reynolds and the attitude of Samuel L. Jackson — seems inspired. But *The Expendables 3* director Patrick Hughes' film never finds the energy, chemistry and surprises

to make the over-familiar concoction thrive.

In terms of buddy action comedy lore, Reynolds' Michael Bryce is The Sensible One. Bryce is a play-it-by-the-book "triple A-rated security guard" whose reputation is in tatters after his high-profile Japanese client (Mr Kurosawa — honestly!) is taken out. Forced to take on a lower-grade form of client (including Richard E. Grant), he is called by Interpol agent and ex-girlfriend Amelia Ryder (Élodie Yung, Elektra in the Netflix *Daredevil* series) to shepherd the improbably named Darius Kincaid (Jackson), the world's most respected assassin, to testify against merciless European dictator Vladislav Dukhovich (Oldman, ticking the Brit villain box). And, of course, Kincaid has tried to kill Bryce 28 times.

So what follows is a Eurotrip that flips from the UK (including, perhaps, cinema's first action sequence set in Coventry) to Italy (there is a fun sing-song with a group of nuns, much to Bryce's embarrassment) to The Hague, where an extended car-boat-bike chase is borderline interminable. The violence is brutal, the body count high, but there is an uninventive feel to Hughes' staging of the action — it's fair to middling octane at best. There are some Tarantino-esque tweaks to add a different flavour: Salma Hayek as Kincaid's incarcerated, yoga-loving, hard-nut wife pops up from time to time and a flashback to her beating up a roomful of heavies to the strains of Lionel Richie's *Hello*, while Kincaid looks on smitten, adds a fun note.

Still, a buddy action comedy lives and dies on the sparring and chemistry of its star pairing. Despite attacking the material with gusto, Reynolds and Jackson can't make substandard repartee ("Eat my ass!" "That's what she said") and rote character arcs land. By the time their initial hatred has blossomed into mutual respect, the fun, like Bryce and Kincaid, has leapt blindly off a tall building. **IAN FREER**

**VERDICT** The leads work hard and there's an attempt to add fun via cheesy music and Salma Hayek, but hackneyed dynamics, half-baked action sequences and saying "motherfucker" a lot does not a Shane Black make.



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## BUSHWICK

★★★★

OUT 25 AUGUST / CERT TBC / 94 MINS

DIRECTORS Cary Murnion, Jonathan Milott

CAST Dave Bautista, Brittany Snow

THIS BLISTERING URBAN-invasion thriller imagines Brooklyn obliterated by an ethnic-cleansing civil war: Texan militias one side, street gangs on the other, and Brittany Snow's student wedged in the middle. Enter Dave Bautista's ex-Marine, who tucks her under his armpit and boulders through the chaos like a human tank. A breakout at this year's Sundance Midnight slot, *Bushwick's* been dubbed *Escape From New York* meets *The Purge*, but the stylistic motor is *Children Of Men*: director duo Murnion and Milott seize the action on surging handheld, often in breathless single takes. Propelled by Aesop Rock's ear-walloping funk score, this is a blazing siren of an indie B movie, spiked with black laughs and buzzing with panic. Sequel please. **SC**



## ROUGH NIGHT

★★

OUT 25 AUGUST / CERT 15 / 101 MINS

DIRECTOR Lucia Aniello

CAST Scarlett Johansson, Kate McKinnon, Jillian Bell, Zoë Kravitz, Ilana Glazer

SCARLETT JOHANSSON HAS appeared in some great movies. The rest of the cast, especially Kate McKinnon and Jillian Bell, are reliable comedy veterans, while the team of writer/director Lucia Aniello and co-writer/actor Paul W. Downs work on the often-inspired Stateside sitcom *Broad City*. So how they've all gelled into a messy, mismatched and only fitfully funny crossbreed of *Bridesmaids* and *Very Bad Things* is even more of a mystery than you might think. There's initially a scruffy comedy appeal, but as the tone attempts to switch with the accidental-death plot taking over, the formula's seams start to show and even the cast's best efforts can't quite salvage this seemingly 'Rough Draft Night'. **JW**



CINEMA

## THE LIMEHOUSE GOLEM

★★

OUT 1 SEPTEMBER

CERT 15 / 109 MINS

DIRECTOR Juan Carlos Medina

CAST Bill Nighy, Olivia Cooke, Douglas Booth, Daniel Mays, Sam Reid, María Valverde

**PLOT** In Victorian London, a spate of murders have police stumped. With the locals terrified, a new detective (Nighy) joins the case, his investigations leading him to an apparently unrelated death which could be the key to the mystery.

A SERIES OF ritualistic killings are baffling an incompetent police force in Victorian London. Sound at all familiar? Despite a small shift eastwards in geography (and one being fictional), the Limehouse Golem and the Jack The Ripper murders have much in common. Starting in 1880 (eight years before Jack began his "funny little game"), the Golem has chalked up five murders by the time Inspector John Kildare (Nighy) is brought onto the case and out of an enforced exile in the theft and fraud department.

He's being set up — a scapegoat for the increasingly agitated press to blame as Scotland Yard protects the reputation of their top man. But he's also good at what he does and, a few deciphered clues later, he has a list of four suspects — Karl Marx (yes, *the* Karl Marx), George Gissing (also a real historical figure), music hall legend Dan Leno (Booth) and failed playwright John Cree (Reid). Cree's the name that quickly stands out — he was poisoned the day after the most recent Golem murder, and his wife Elizabeth (Cooke) is standing trial for his murder. Can Kildare pull off the dual feat of solving the Golem murders while simultaneously saving this innocent woman from the gallows? Well, he's going to give it a damn good go.

All this established, the meat of the story is told via messily placed flashbacks — some originating from the trial, others from Kildare's

surprisingly frequent and unsupervised trips to Elizabeth's roomy jail cell. Much of this reminiscing takes us to a London music hall where we see Elizabeth go from dogsbody to star and meet her doomed husband.

The film's problems stem from this structure. Nighy is given the beginnings of a character — he's a great detective, previously wronged by his colleagues, and has rumours about his private life hanging over his head, but none of this is properly explored. Instead, from this strong start point, Kildare is quickly reduced to little more than a storytelling device — his presence merely facilitating the recounting of Elizabeth's life story. And, conveyed this way, the murder mystery is no mystery at all — the culprit being so obvious for so long, it may have well been revealed at the beginning like this was an episode of *Columbo*.

It's in the slices of Victorian music hall life where the film is at its best, elevated to the standard of a Sunday night TV drama. Bawdy songs are sung and off-colour jokes are told (all of which seem tame by today's standards), and they add palpable energy to the engagingly soapy proceedings of the players' relationships. Booth is especially memorable as the troupe's star and Olivia's surrogate big brother.

There's also glee taken in the theatricality of the Golem's murders. One victim is sawn up, the head placed on an altar, while the limbs and torso are placed on the pews as a rapt audience for a macabre sermon. In another instance, a penis is left as a bookmark in a volume of Jewish folklore — the source of the press' 'Golem' nickname for the killer. But this fails to translate into an effective atmosphere. Where the violence should shock or repel, it instead comes off as cartoonish, the film never successfully capturing the fear of the local populace or the danger potentially lurking in Limehouse's gas-lit streets. But while this is a problem, telegraphing its villain, but believing it hasn't, is *The Limehouse Golem's* greatest crime. **JONATHAN PILE**

**VERDICT** A great cast is let down by a script that fails to provide a compelling mystery to solve. Never mind as a big-screen production, this would be disappointing as a BBC mini-series.





## CINEMA

## AN INCONVENIENT SEQUEL: TRUTH TO POWER

★★★★

OUT 18 AUGUST  
CERT TBC / 116 MINS

**DIRECTORS** Bonni Cohen, Jon Shenk  
**CAST** Al Gore

**PLOT** Ten years on from *An Inconvenient Truth*, environmentalist Al Gore travels the world, visiting the effects of global warming and taking an active role in the UN 2015 Climate Change Conference.

YOU CAN ALMOST count the number of documentary franchises on one hand. From Michael Apted's *7up* series — the James Bond of documentary film — to Joshua Oppenheimer's brace, *The Act Of Killing* and *The Look Of Silence*, few documentaries achieve the cut-through, both artistically and financially, to warrant a follow-up. So it says something about 2006's *An Inconvenient Truth* that it earned, even demanded a sequel. Grossing \$50 million at the worldwide box office and a Best Documentary Oscar, ex Vice President Al Gore's call to arms put climate change into the cultural/political conversation in a way cinema — or little else — had done before. Bonni Cohen and Jon Shenk, replacing original director Davis Guggenheim, have created a thought-provoking, important but only patchily gripping sequel that — and this was a big ask — doesn't achieve the urgency or impact of its progenitor.

A jauntier presence this time around, Gore jet-sets around the globe, visiting affected areas (melting Icelandic glaciers, flooded Miami streets), meeting politicians and business leaders whose corporate interests he argues are sabotaging his agenda, and imparting climate change training to wannabe green advocates. Here *Truth To Power*, like its predecessor, remains slide-showstastic. Charting what Gore dubs conditions

from “the book of Revelation”, his talks PowerPoint up a bundle of frightening facts (14 of Earth's hottest recorded years have been since 2001) and compelling imagery (the shoes of a woman visibly sticking to a hot road in India), and offers a telling benchmark ten years on: in the original film, an animated section imagined rising seas flooding the site of the World Trade Center; now Gore can ditch the pre-visualisations and show Super Storm Sandy running roughshod over Ground Zero. These early sections offer a number of potent points but lack shape and momentum, often biting off more than they can chew and skimming over important topics.

The film gets better when the story shifts to Paris in 2015. There are dramatic moments as Gore's 24-hour climate change broadcast is disrupted by the terrorist attacks — he argues it was no coincidence — and the film gains added agency and suspense during the UN Climate Change Conference where Gore tries to undo India's commitment to coal-fired power plants by wheeler-dealing on the price of solar-powered projects to make them more attractive. If the film overplays Gore's hand in achieving the Paris agreement, his tenacity, intelligence and commitment to change is palpable.

Weirdly, it's a film at once hopped up on hope — the astonishing results of solar power in Chile, a hard-line Republican mayor in Texas whose switch to renewable energy saves his constituents money — yet marinated in pessimism. Peppered throughout the film is footage of (then Presidential candidate) Trump's denial of climate change realities, and the film sidelines Gore's attempts to engage the retrograde President. He describes in voiceover his inability to turn world leaders around on fossil fuels as “a personal failure”, but there is something winning in his common-sense optimism. Fingers crossed America warms to his insightful positivity and makes a threequel — ‘An Inconvenient Truth And The Last Crusade’ — redundant. **IAN FREER**

**VERDICT** Like many sequels, *Truth To Power* is bigger but messier than its predecessor. While it doesn't quite deliver the oomph of the original, it is still a timely, persuasive wake-up call.



## TOM OF FINLAND

★★★★

OUT 11 AUGUST / CERT 18 / 114 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Dome Karukoski  
**CAST** Pekka Strang, Lauri Tilkkanen, Jessica Grabowsky, Taisto Oksanen

A MAJOR INFLUENCE on everyone from Robert Mapplethorpe to The Village People, Tom of Finland's monochrome drawings of well-hung hunks are instantly recognisable. The life of their creator, Touko Laaksonen, is less familiar, however, and it's chronicled with sincerity, if not exactly trenchancy in this handsome biopic. Director Dome Karukoski takes his time establishing the oppressive Finnish setting before hurtling through events and epidemics that occurred after Laaksonen conquered America. Ageing 50 years, Pekka Strang poignantly portrays a gentle man whose attitudes and art were shaped by his wartime experiences and a refusal to be untrue to himself. But too many issues are skirted for this to be a definitive study. **DP**



## NAPPING PRINCESS

★★

OUT 16 AUGUST / CERT TBC / 110 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Kenji Kamiyama  
**CAST** Mitsuki Takahata, Shinnosuke Mitsushima, Yōsuke Eguchi

JAPANESE ANIME UP-and-comer Kenji Kamiyama has been in the past trusted with part of the *Ghost In The Shell* franchise, but here he bites off more than he can chew with this half-baked attempt on what amounts to a take on *Inception*, albeit with talking toys. The premise — a troubled girl's lucid dreams paralleling her life spill into the real world — is interesting, but Kamiyama's conceptual imagination writes cheques his screenwriting fingers can't cash. There's a baffling amount of corporate espionage. Confused over which audience it serves, and failing to take advantage of a premise with much promise, this is a misfire. That said, if your kids are into flow charts, go for it. **AL**



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## DARK NIGHT

★★★

OUT 18 AUGUST / CERT 12A / 85 MINS

DIRECTOR Tim Sutton

CAST Robert Jumper, Eddie Cacciola, Aaron Purvis

SARASOTA, FLORIDA. A group of people who don't know each other spend the day before a tragedy going about their lives while one of their number plans a massacre. Just as Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* — to which this owes a huge debt — did not precisely recreate the Columbine murders, Tim Sutton's *Dark Night* isn't a true-crime drama about the shootings in a cinema where *The Dark Knight Rises* was screening in Aurora, Colorado, in 2012. Instead it's a portrait of an increasingly fractured America a generation beyond Columbine, locked into the isolation bubbles of phone or WiFi. It's a worthy — if chilly and difficult — addition to the sadly extensive filmography of American mass murder. **KN**



## STRATTON

★★

OUT 1 SEPTEMBER / CERT 15 / 94 MINS

DIRECTOR Simon West

CAST Dominic Cooper, Tyler Hoechlin, Connie Nielsen, Gemma Chan

SPECIAL BOAT SERVICE commando John Stratton (Cooper) is assigned to track down Barovsky (Thomas Kretschmann), a former Russian agent who is plotting an international terror campaign and planning an attack on London. It's a relentlessly square, old-fashioned yarn, even placed beside *Spooks: The Greater Good* or the London-set season of *24*, let alone recent Bond or Bourne entries. Dialogue is all cliché, a solid cast get not much to go on — Cooper has decent enough opportunities to thump people but doesn't get to show off any suaveness or cunning — and even the action scenes have a rushed, unfinished feel. Gun-for-hire director Simon West still hasn't matched the high-water mark of his lunatic debut *Con Air*. **KN**



CINEMA

## UNA

★★★

OUT 1 SEPTEMBER

CERT TBC / 94 MINS

DIRECTOR Benedict Andrews

CAST Rooney Mara, Ben Mendelsohn, Riz Ahmed

**PLOT** Una (Mara) hasn't seen Ray (Mendelsohn) in around 15 years, but when she spots his photo in the paper she decides to visit him — raking up an abusive past that he would like to forget, but she is unable to.

IT'S ONLY A short while into *Una* that the signs begin to indicate this may have started life as a play. The cast list is sparse, with only a few brief invasions into a two-hander. Characters move between multiple locations to continue the same conversation. Pregnant silences abound. Some plays translate smoothly to the screen — *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* — but it's not always the case that a great play makes a great movie. Some need the audience sharing the same stuffy air as the actors to build the atmosphere and the artificiality of the stage to forgive lapses in realism. Film is less forgiving. *Una* is a powerful story that sits uncomfortably in its new setting.

*Blackbird*, the David Harrower play from which *Una* was adapted, won an Olivier award and Tony nominations. Originally a two-character drama, it centres on a woman, Una, in her late twenties who finds the middle-aged man, Ray, who sexually abused her when she was 13. It's somewhere between a confrontation and a reunion. Una doesn't display any obvious fear of her abuser and contends still that they were in love. Ray rejects the label of "paedophile", while acknowledging their relationship did happen. He has served prison time and moved on with his life, but his actions had consequences — Una never had the opportunity to work through what happened so is still stuck, emotionally, in a time 15 years past.

It's a queasy journey to take with them and the film isn't afraid to wade into the murk of their relationship. The power between them keeps twisting, the now adult Una trying to seduce the frightened Ray, then being lowered by rejection. There's the stinging unfairness of Ray being able to 'serve his time', while there's no such process for the victim. Harrower's script is careful not to give Ray sympathy, but it gives him space and there are very brief moments of sadness for him, though flashbacks serve to quickly remind us of the abuser Ray is. (As the young Una, Ruby Stokes does a superb job playing a girl who is playing at grown-ups.)

As Una, Rooney Mara puts her aloof screen presence to strong use. Una isn't likeable, but she has no reason to be. Mara makes her a woman who's just about held something together from a life that should have broken her. Ben Mendelsohn is brilliant casting as Ray. Even playing monsters, there's a charming quality to him, which is the kind of muddled message Ray needs.

Director Benedict Andrews, whose background is in theatre, makes bold choices with varying success. He cuts harshly between timeframes in a way that can be disconcerting, but which works for the confusion of Una's state. Sometimes its contrasts are horribly effective, one cut jumping from grown-up Una lying on a child's bed to Ray and young Una on a Ferris wheel, Ray trying to turn what looks like a paternal scene into a romantic seduction. But Andrews' choice to give the film a stylised look, with lots of Kubrickian corridors, enhances the staginess instead of reducing it.

Once the central conversation is done, the film stutters. The final 20 minutes strives to find something that would work as a satisfactory conclusion, but doesn't really manage it. The problem being there isn't a story outside Una and Ray's extended discussion. It has a situation that suits a play, but not a plot that suits a film.

OLLY RICHARDS

**VERDICT** It's a film to see for the performances, which are faultless, but while it's sometimes riveting this play has been awkwardly translated to screen.





CINEMA

## PATTI CAKE\$

★★★★★

OUT 1 SEPTEMBER  
CERT 15 / 109 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Jeremy Jasper

**CAST** Danielle Macdonald, Mamoudou Athie, Cathy Moriarty, Siddharth Dhananjay, Bridget Everett

**PLOT** A white female rapper (Macdonald) dreams of escaping her smalltown existence and becoming a star. With the help of her misfit friends, she hits upon a unique sound and sets about getting their demo tape into the hands of anyone who matters.

IN THE LAST half decade, “cultural appropriation” has become an accusation commonly levelled at any white rapper who dares to so much as throw a gang sign. In 2013, we saw Lily Allen get it in the neck from the Twitterati for the twerking black and Asian back-up dancers in the video for *Hard Out Here*. At the end of last year, Honey G — a middle-aged white woman — got the same treatment week in, week out on *The X Factor*: her many critics included Lily Allen, who described her performances as “so wrong on so many levels”.

The professionally outraged will likely find the opening scenes here similarly problematic. We meet the white 23-year-old Patricia (Macdonald), aka Killer P, via a dream sequence in which she is on stage basking in the adulation of a huge crowd hanging on her every rhyme about “the game”. She wakes up, and we see that in reality she lives in a small New Jersey house with her alcoholic mother (Everett), who is a failed hair-metal singer and regards hip hop as not even being music. Patricia works a dead-end bar job and is a long way from making her dreams come true. Her partner in crime is an Asian boy (and Drake-style R’n’B singer) named Jheri (Dhananjay) who works in a chemist and is the only one who recognises her lyrical genius and dextrous flow. He eggs her on into a car park rap battle — always an effective, tension-creating

movie device — that she wins against a white, male rapper, but which sees her then take a punch in the face from her victim. Haters, it becomes clear, are going to hate.

Enter the film’s central, racial balance-readdressing African-American character: a near-mute, Marilyn Manson-esque, coloured contact lens-wearing, Satanic-noise-rocker named Bob (Athie), who also goes by the name Basterd The Antichrist (in other words, the sort of kid who you might expect to be white). Together with Jheri and — yes, really — Patricia’s grandma (Moriarty), they form a band, complete with the quite inevitable, “We’re really onto something!” scene in which this diverse gang of outsiders spontaneously create a song that is supposed to be undeniably genius, but in truth is just endearingly naff. From here, first-time writer/director Jasper continues with a tone that is kitsch and earnest in equal measure, proceedings climaxing with the also-inevitable talent contest — do talent contests like this exist anywhere other than in climatic movie scenes anymore? — where the band are initially booed and have stuff thrown at them, but are then screamed at like gods before their first verse has even finished.

There are plenty of you-cannot-be-serious moments throughout here, but the performance of Macdonald saves this Sundance festival hit from just being all a bit silly. She is startlingly compelling from the off, the desperation on her face during every knockback making you yearn along with her. She bounces fantastically off all her supporting cast, allowing us to overlook the implausibility of the story and to buy into the central, obvious themes of never giving up on your dreams, that friendship and family are more important than money and stardom, and that being a bit different should be something that is celebrated. When the feelgood payoff finally comes, it feels genuinely fantastic. **HAMISH MACBAIN**

**VERDICT** A story we’ve seen told a hundred times before feels fresh thanks to Danielle Macdonald’s brilliant performance, handling both the drama and the rapping in style.



## MOON DOGS

★★★

OUT 1 SEPTEMBER / CERT 15 / 93 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Philip John

**CAST** Jack Parry-Jones, Christy O’Donnell, Tara Lee, Claire Cage

NOVELTY AND COGENCY may be at a premium in this Celtic road movie, but feature debutant Philip John makes a spirited transition from television in hurtling bickering stepbrothers Michael (Parry-Jones), who is Welsh, and Thor (O’Donnell), who is part-Viking, from Shetland to Glasgow in the company of resourceful Irish singer Caitlin (Lee). The quests to locate Michael’s student girlfriend and Thor’s estranged mother are merely an excuse to string together a series of misadventures involving weddings, piercings and a toy piano. But, while the wisecracking is more effective than the slapstick, the inevitable romantic rivalry and the quirky musical interludes, this is always briskly and often bruisingly amusing. **DP**



## BACK TO BURGUNDY

★★★

OUT 1 SEPTEMBER / CERT TBC / 113 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Cédric Klapisch

**CAST** Pio Marmaï, Ana Girardot, François Civil

THE STORY OF a returning prodigal son, Jean (Marmaï), set amid France’s vineyards, *Back To Burgundy* (*Ce Qui Nous Lie* in France — roughly “this is what links us”) proffers dying parents, struggling marriages and sibling strife, but doesn’t successfully tug on your emotions in a way those subjects would suggest. Instead, its strength is its setting. When it’s focusing on the wine — with scenes of blind fruit tastings to hone taste buds or characters attempting to guess the year of a wine — there are enjoyable insights into just how skilled its makers need to be; while lingering shots of cellars stacked high with dusty bottles provide a romantic view of that world in the way images of a half-drunk bottle of Jacob’s Creek on a kitchen table never could. **JP**





Perhaps he'd got the wrong address for the Hallowe'en bash.

CINEMA

## A GHOST STORY

★★★★

OUT 11 AUGUST  
CERT 12A / 92 MINS

**DIRECTOR** David Lowery  
**CAST** Casey Affleck, Rooney Mara

**PLOT** Musician 'C' (Affleck) and his wife 'M' (Mara) prepare to move out of their modest rural bungalow. Their relationship seems to fluctuate, until out of the blue, he's killed. Rising from a mortuary slab in a white sheet, he returns to his home to observe as his old life drifts slowly away.

**THE TALE OF** a dead man who haunts his old home wearing a bed sheet with the eyes cut out, *A Ghost Story's* semi-absurdist premise shouldn't work. The shot lengths are somewhere between long and interminable, its star is a faceless presence throughout, and there's a seven-minute scene with a pie. Some will find it overly grandiose (if you've ever wondered what Terrence Malick's *Rentaghost* might look like, there are worse places to start looking), while its languorous pacing won't be to all tastes. Yet, somehow, its

gentle ruminations on death and mourning and the passing of time cast a powerful spell.

The film begins quietly, with its central couple, 'C' and 'M' (with eerie anonymity, Affleck and Mara's characters are referred to only by their initials), sharing a moment of tenderness on the sofa. "I'm so scared," M laughs. "Why are you scared?" he asks. "I don't know." The exchange proves prophetic. Soon C is lying on a mortuary slab following an off-camera car accident. Here the film's mysteries begin to reveal themselves. C rises from the dead and, trailing sheets behind him like a Scooby-Doo villain on a budget, returns home.

Invisible to his wife and with time seeming to accelerate, he witnesses as she first grieves then begins to move on with her life. With heartbreaking impassiveness, he just stands by, watching as she brings a date back to the house, and again as she prepares to move out. Across the yard, another sheet-clad spectre appears at the neighbour's window. Ghost C is not the only one in this linen-clad purgatory, yet he's very much alone.

Through all this, writer-director David Lowery offers a ghost's-eye view on our place in the world that throws up the biggest of questions. How long will we be remembered? Can we really expect to live on beyond our deaths? Is everything that marked our time on Earth destined to be washed away? As one partygoer (a peppery cameo

from musician Will Oldham, aka Bonnie 'Prince' Billy) muses at a gathering in the house years later, all efforts to be remembered are doomed because, "By and by, the planet will die." Cheering stuff.

As with Lowery's first pairing of Affleck and Mara, 2013's *Ain't Them Bodies Saints*, a Texan crime romance with echoes of *Badlands*, the comparisons with Malick are apt again here: in the spirit of *The Tree Of Life*, *A Ghost Story* is both deeply intimate and vast in scope, bridging years, then centuries, before looping back on itself. Meanwhile, Daniel Hart's score stitches together its long takes with sorrowful strings.

What's hard to imagine is what the more straightforward horror movie Lowery originally conceived would have looked like. The closest he comes to delivering a jump scare is a banging piano lid, or some futzing about with lights as Affleck's apparition succumbs to impotent rage. What he's crafted instead is a genre all of its own — existential horror? Limbosploitation flick? Machine-washable indie? It's difficult, and hard to love, but it's certainly a film unlike anything else you'll see this year. **PHIL DE SEMLYEN**

**VERDICT** It demands patience and an open mind, but Lowery's return to his indie roots after *Pete's Dragon* is a highly unusual and, at times, emotionally shattering fable.





## CINEMA

## DUNKIRK



OUT NOW  
CERT 12A / 106 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Christopher Nolan

**CAST** Fionn Whitehead, Mark Rylance, Tom Hardy, Kenneth Branagh, Harry Styles, Cillian Murphy, Jack Lowden

**PLOT** May, 1940. Overpowered by the Nazis in mainland Europe, the British army has been forced to retreat to a small enclave on the French coast. With the enemy advancing on their position and the route home blocked, it looks like only a miracle will prevent calamity. At stake: 400,000 lives and the course of the entire war.

CHRISTOPHER NOLAN'S NEW film may be his *The Longest Day*, but it's very close to being his shortest film. In fact, at a mere 106 minutes, *Dunkirk* is the first Nolan movie to dip beneath two hours since *Insomnia*, and is only undercut by his micro-budget 1998 debut *Following*. But discard any suspicions that may prompt about scaling down of ambition. Effectively one enormous, stunningly rendered and thunderously intense set-piece stretched to feature length, *Dunkirk* thrusts you into a pressure cooker and slams the lid on. There's a very good reason it doesn't have a more fulsome runtime: audiences would likely have staggered out with PTSD.

The scenario is simple — hellishly so. Eight months into World War II, following a series of setbacks, roughly 400,000 British troops find themselves stranded on the shores of Northern France. Behind them, Nazis are closing in. Bombs

fall from Stukas in the sky, torpedoes whizz in from U-boats in the sea. And ahead lie 39 nautical miles of grey, churning water separating the soldiers from home, with nary a boat to come to their rescue.

While there is a high-ranking naval officer on hand (Kenneth Branagh) to play Admiral Exposition, filling in the big picture while surveying the nightmare from a pier, Nolan doesn't bombard us with information. He knows it's more powerful to sell the hopelessness of the wind-blasted beach with a stark, simple image, such as the moment in which a Tommy simply gives up and wades into the water. *Dunkirk* is first and foremost a mood-piece, and a hugely effective one. It doesn't hurt that Hans Zimmer is on ferocious form, his score by turns throbbing like a heart and ticking like an angry stopwatch.

But if the movie's set-up is basic, its structure is anything but. No filmmaker is as fascinated by





**Clockwise from left:** Young Tommies Alex (Harry Styles), Gibson (Aneurin Barnard) and Tommy (Fionn Whitehead); Plucky Mr. Dawson (Mark Rylance); Commander Bolton (Kenneth Branagh) surveys the scene; Peter (Tom Glynn-Carney) with Cillian Murphy's 'Shivering Soldier'.

time as Nolan, and here he applies the temporal tricksiness he pioneered with *Inception*, intercutting three timelines that move at different speeds. So we follow wan young soldier Tommy (Fionn Whitehead) on the land for a week, plucky yachter Dawson (Mark Rylance) on the sea for a day, and stoic RAF pilot Farrier (Tom Hardy) in the sky for an hour. The result, as the crisis hurtles towards its climax and the trio of perspectives converge (and overtake each other), is meticulous and mesmerising. And, in the case of a sequence which cuts between two characters trying not to drown, almost unbearably stressful. There have been many World War II epics — there's even been one called *Dunkirk* before, made in 1958 — but there's never been one like this.

Another point of differentiation: there's little emphasis on derring-do. Rather than heroics, Nolan is concerned with what men can endure. *Dunkirk* is a study of people under immense

pressure, from Rylance's civilian-on-a-rescue-mission (call him the FBG — Friendly Boat Guy) to Cillian Murphy's traumatised wreck-survivor (credited only as 'Shivering Soldier') to Harry Styles' bolshy infantry grunt (an impressive debut performance). At this darkest of hours, some of them crack; others hold firm. But all of the arcs are effectively underplayed, with muted performances, no big speeches and, in the case of Tommy, the terrified audience surrogate, almost no talking at all. It could be argued the characters are too thin, but at least there's none of the melodrama of, say, *Titanic* or *Pearl Harbor*, two other epics based on real-life disasters. If anything, *Dunkirk* hews towards the arthouse, with the melancholy, spume-flecked tableaux it lingers on beautifully photographed by *Interstellar* DP Hoyte Van Hoytema.

Where it does deliver on action is in the sky. Today's audiences have spent decades

watching digital dogfights in *Star Wars* movies, themselves originally inspired by World War II movies such as *Twelve O'Clock High*. Nolan gets the wow factor back by stripping back the pixels, shooting real Spitfires on real sorties above the real English Channel. The results are incredible, particularly on the vast expanse of an IMAX screen, with the wobbly crates veering and soaring above a mass of blue. As with the men below, the pilots are outnumbered and outgunned, heading into a hopeless situation, but not letting it affect their trajectory. The phrase "Dunkirk spirit" was coined following the events of May 1940, and *Dunkirk* captures it in spades. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

**VERDICT** A spare, propulsive, ever-intensifying combat thriller, Nolan's history lesson is both a rousing celebration of solidarity and the tensest beach-set film since *Jaws*.





CINEMA

## VALERIAN AND THE CITY OF A THOUSAND PLANETS

★★★

OUT NOW  
CERT 12A / 137 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Luc Besson

**CAST** Dane DeHaan, Cara Delevingne, Clive Owen, Rihanna, Herbie Hancock, Sam Spruell, Ethan Hawke

**PLOT** In the mid-26th century, special agents Valerian (DeHaan) and Laureline (Delevingne) must deal with a mysterious threat to the deep-space metropolis of Alpha, while also dealing with their growing attraction to each other.

LUC BESSON'S LATEST is something he's been itching to make for more than 20 years. It's based on comic strips that fired his imagination as a *petit garçon* (the *Star Wars*-influencing *Valérian And Laureline*, by Pierre Christin and Jean-Claude Mézières). It's enabled him to let loose with digital techniques he wished he'd had back on *The Fifth Element*. And he's made it on his own terms, free of studio interference, despite the production's whopping \$180 million budget. In short, *Valerian And The City Of A Thousand Planets* is the most ambitious and risky cinematic endeavour since James Cameron made *Avatar*.

The result is a breathless, boundless, candy-neon pinball-machine theme-park freak-out so lacking in any sense of creative restraint it makes most other space operas look shabby and timid. If you thought *Jupiter Ascending* was visually conservative and insufficiently bewildering, or that *The Force Awakens* would have been improved by a five-minute sequence in which Rihanna pole-dances as a shapeshifting prostitute, *Valerian* is the movie for you. With jellyfish that eat memories, aquatic monsters the

size of cathedrals and a bazaar so bizarre it exists simultaneously in different dimensions, it's like *Guardians Of The Galaxy* might have turned out if James Gunn were a being made of pure mescaline.

On one level, you *have* to applaud Besson. This is world-building where not even the sky is the limit and every frame is stuffed with mad-genius invention. It's the oil on canvas to *The Fifth Element*'s doodle on a beer mat. But what's missing is... well... everything else. Story. Character. Coherence. A sense of pace, even.

At two-and-a-quarter hours long, *Valerian* is a marathon run at a sprint. It's exhausting. During those rare nano-moments where oh-so-pretty leads Dane DeHaan and Cara Delevingne slow down to talk and flirt, they communicate only in leaden cliché-ese. "My heart will belong to you and no-one else," blabs Valerian; "You're scared of commitment," Laureline drones in response. Besson may be able to marshal the mighty forces of VFX to craft any weirdo monster or spaceship his distended subconscious can squirt out, but he can't create any chemistry between these two.

DeHaan, a damn fine actor who's best employed as the wan outsider, is desperately miscast as the supposedly suave hero. Delevingne has little more to do than pout, glower and punch Clive Owen. There's no sense of depth or history, no reason to care for their mission or their ersatz romance.

As for the plot they have to propel, once you strip away all the shiny, greeble-covered cladding, it's flimsier than a bottle rocket attempting re-entry. There's a cute alien critter our heroes have to rescue from a place. Then they take it to another place, where aliens who look like supermodels want the critter back. That's pretty much it, and yet somehow you still feel befuddled.

The sad truth is, once the giddy novelty of riding dodgems in Besson's psychedelic space carnival wanes, it all becomes quite grating. Almost enough to make you want to grab the nearest memory-eating jellyfish. **DAN JOLIN**

**VERDICT** A wildly ambitious space opera, but also a self-indulgent narrative morass. Sometimes, it seems, creativity can benefit from a few limitations.



## ENGLAND IS MINE

★★

OUT 4 AUGUST / CERT 15 / 94 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Mark Gill

**CAST** Jack Lowden, Jessica Brown Findlay, Jodie Comer, Peter McDonald

THE MONEY SHOT in this Morrissey origin story comes five minutes from the end, when one Johnny Marr (Laurie Kynaston) knocks on his door. Prior to that, it's largely him poring obsessively over the *NME*, plenty of ostentatious close-ups of his typewriter and comically literal interpretations of his later lyrics (he looks for a job, he finds a job, and heaven knows he is miserable then). Despite looking nothing like Moz and being much too old to play the 17-year-old version of him, Jack Lowden does a decent impression, but that's all this really feels like: an impression of one of the most fascinating pop stars ever, in a film that doesn't dare delve into what made him so. **HM**



## 47 METERS DOWN

★★★

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 87 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Johannes Roberts

**CAST** Mandy Moore, Claire Holt, Matthew Modine, Yani Gellman

A SOLID ENTRY into the hellish-holiday (or slaycation) sub-genre (*The Descent*, *Wolf Creek*, *The Shallows*). Sharks are again the big bad here — sisters Lisa (Moore) and Kate (Holt) go on a cage dive, only for the cable to snap, sending them plummeting to the ocean floor. It's effective at ratcheting up the tension — their cage both prison and their only salvation from the circling great whites. Its character-crafting isn't anywhere near as artful, though, and the dramatic irony is laid on rather thickly ("I wanna stay down here forever," Lisa says as they first go under), but director Johannes Roberts isn't aiming for high art here. And a bit of cheese hardly spoils the big-silly-thrill-fun mood. **DJ**





The Seattle police had opted for radical new uniforms.

## TV & STREAMING

# DEATH NOTE

★★★★

NETFLIX  
OUT 25 AUGUST

**DIRECTOR** Adam Wingard

**CAST** Nat Wolff, Margaret Qualley, Keith Stanfield, Paul Nakauchi, Shea Whigham, Willem Dafoe

**PLOT** Student Light (Wolff) picks up a strange notebook that will kill anyone whose name is written in it. After eliminating two miscreants, Light is tempted to rid the world of evildoers.

**THE DEATH NOTE** saga is a phenomenon in Japan. Debuting in 2003, the manga serial scored Stephen King-level sales, which led to an animated series and a run of live-action movies. In Western horror terms, it's a crossover success akin to Thomas Harris' Hannibal Lecter properties rather than the likes of, say, the *Final Destination* franchise. There have been *Death Note* computer games, stage musicals and novelty notebooks with which to curse your enemies.

While comparable J-hits such as *Ring* and *The Grudge* were easily retooled into English-

language versions, an American *Death Note* has been in development hell for a decade and now only emerges after a significant pre-production wobble. Director Adam Wingard (*You're Next*, *Blair Witch*) was due to make a theatrical *Death Note* feature for Warner Bros. but the studio put the project into turnaround — only for Netflix to come to the rescue. In the event, it's a shame Netflix didn't get on board earlier, for the complicated, satisfyingly nuanced saga would make more sense as an episodic show along the lines of *Stranger Things* than a standalone feature. If you're new to this world, Wingard's *Death Note* has a lot going for it but long-time Death-Notees will regret the loss of great swathes of plot (along with a bunch of vivid secondary characters) and the simplification not only of the story but of the morality.

The hump the film gets over successfully is the complicated, far-fetched cartoon conceit. There are pages of densely written rules about how the death curse works — Wingard adds a delicious, savvy touch about the way no-one ever reads terms and conditions, even when their lives (or souls) are at stake. Then there's the Japanese death god who becomes the teen protagonist's invisible best friend — a potentially ludicrous effect successfully realised with less cartoonish CGI than in the Japanese films and

a terrific voice performance from Willem Dafoe, who delivers the perfect mix of friendly malice and sinister unctuousness. Leading man Nat Wolff, although credible as a smart school outcast, struggles with the arc of Light, who goes from aggrieved local vigilante to a globally famous figure of terror (adopting the name 'Kira') as his campaign to slay untouchable evildoers gets underway. His position is complicated because his own father (Whigham) is the honest cop in charge of the case, and the teenage supersleuth L (Stanfield) called in to catch the uncatchable murderer realises Kira must be linked to the Seattle police department.

The plot hinges on a battle between the supernaturally aided Light and emo Sherlock Holmes L, but both are upstaged by Mia (Qualley), Light's girlfriend and co-conspirator. She dominates the latter stages as she decides she knows better and sets out to win the death god over to her side. Inevitably, a lot more story is set in motion than can be resolved, but there's so much great stuff here you hope there'll be follow-ups to explore the rest. **KIM NEWMAN**

**VERDICT** Too fast-paced to be properly frightening, this is still an engaging and thought-provoking mix of moral quandary drama and wild supernatural thriller.





## TV &amp; STREAMING

## THE DEFENDERS

★★★★

NETFLIX

OUT 18 AUGUST

EPISODES VIEWED 1-4

**CREATORS** Douglas Petrie, Marco Ramirez  
**CAST** Charlie Cox, Krysten Ritter, Mike Colter, Finn Jones, Sigourney Weaver, Elodie Yung

**PLOT** Under the leadership of the mysterious Alexandra (Weaver), shadowy criminal organisation The Hand steps up its nefarious plans for New York City — plans which threaten widespread death and destruction. It's up to four dysfunctional super-vigilantes to put aside their hang-ups and join forces to stop them.

**FROM DAY ONE**, when Netflix and Marvel first heralded a set of series based on some of the comic-book company's fringe superheroes, we knew this was coming. And just as the early MCU movies teased the Avengers over four years, so its smaller-scale small-screen cousin has been gradually, inexorably building up to a crossover that sees *Daredevil* (Cox), Jessica Jones (Ritter), Luke Cage (Colter) and Iron Fist (Jones) sharing the frame as the Avengers' scrappier, grittier, street-level equivalent.

But while *Daredevil* first streamed only two years ago, it feels as if it's been a much longer journey to get here than it was for the Avengers. Much of that is down to the format — it's taken 65 episodes, via four shows and five seasons, whose moments of genius (those long-take *Daredevil* fight scenes; *Luke Cage*'s musical numbers and slap-fu; all of *Jessica Jones*) have been tempered by chunks of frustration (*Daredevil*'s irritatingly perky sidekicks Foggy & Karen; the non-event that was the appearance of Luke Cage's nemesis Diamondback; much of *Iron Fist*). We could but hope that, lessons learned, *The Defenders* would put right all the solo-shows did wrong — not least the stretching of thin plots over 13-episode structures — while

playing to each hero's super-strengths.

The good news is *The Defenders* comes in at a leaner, punchier eight episodes. And showrunners Doug Petrie and Marco Ramirez (fresh from *Daredevil*'s second season) do have some crowd-pleasing fun with the lead characters' interactions. When Luke and Iron Fist (who are actually partners and best buds in the comics) first meet, they have a full-on punch-up — and we get to see exactly what happens when chi-infused knuckles hit a bulletproof jaw. There's a savvy sense of self-awareness, too — borderline meta, arguably. At one point Iron Fist admits, "I tried being a one-man army and I failed"; many critics of his solo show would readily agree with him. Meanwhile, the team's somewhat uneven skill balance is swiftly skewered by Jessica: "Am I the only person around here who doesn't know karate?" she snarks.

However, even with fewer episodes, you can still feel that Marvel/Netflix narrative drag. It's not until the end of episode three that the crime-fighting quartet is finally formed (with predictable reluctance) and we start to feel we're finally watching a show with its own style and identity rather than intercut clips from their solo outings.

And, we're sorry to report, the big threat that unites the group proves a mild disappointment, even if she is played by Sigourney Weaver. Alexandra feels like yet another businessperson baddie whose dirty deeds are hidden by sharp suits, while the ongoing, vague chicanery of The Hand (like HYDRA, but ninjas) fails to ignite much excitement. Indeed, the peerless Weaver herself seems desperately bored by it all.

Even so, there is enough joy to be found, especially in watching the sparks fly as these four alpha characters finally collide. It may have been a long time coming, but as the season finally kicks in, it feels as though *The Defenders* might just have been worth the wait. **DAN JOLIN**

**VERDICT** A long-anticipated crossover series that delivers some engaging character clashes, but which fails — in the first half at least — to up the ante story-wise.



## STRIKE

★★★★

BBC ONE / iPLAYER / AIRS FROM 27 AUGUST

EPISODES SEEN 1-2

**DIRECTOR** Michael Keillor**CAST** Tom Burke, Holliday Grainger, Kerr Logan

AN ADAPTATION OF J.K. Rowling's *other* franchise — the Cormoran Strike series of detective novels published under the pseudonym Robert Galbraith. Strike (Burke) is an ex-military policeman-turned-PI and the illegitimate son of a famous rock star hired, in the first of three cases, to investigate the death of a supermodel. The police claim it was suicide, her brother believes otherwise... guess who's right. It's exceptionally cast — both Tom Burke, as the gruff PI, and Holliday Grainger, as his temp-turned-researcher Robin, are perfect fits — and makes good use of its Soho setting. But whipping through all three books in just seven episodes seems rashly pacy. What's the plan for series two? **JP**



## THE LAST TYCOON

★★

AMAZON PRIME VIDEO / OUT NOW

EPISODES SEEN ALL

**CREATOR** Billy Ray**CAST** Matt Bomer, Kelsey Grammer, Lily Collins, Dominique McElligott

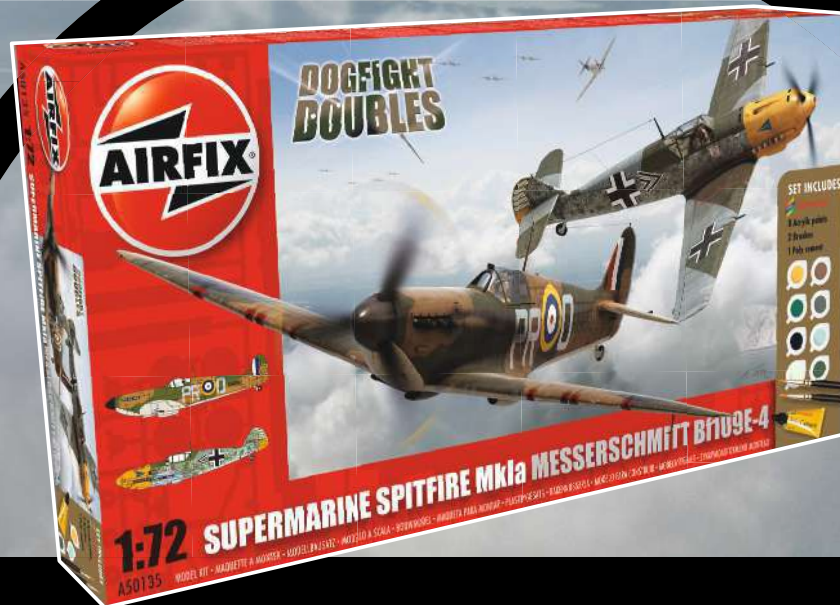
THE HOLLYWOOD CAREER of F. Scott Fitzgerald yielded just one film (1938's *Three Comrades*) but it fed some of his richest fiction: most notably, unfinished novel *The Last Tycoon*. Based on that book, this is set at Brady-American, an underdog studio scrabbling for a hit while trying to contain a power struggle between moguls Monroe Stahr (Bomer) and Pat Brady (Grammer). It's soon obvious you're not really watching a Fitzgerald adaptation, but a punt at a 1930s *Mad Men* — a saga of professional ambition and personal anguish, filmed in lush amber tones that echo a Golden Era turning to rust. It has a strong pilot and finale, but hours of luscious mediocrity in-between. **SC**





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## GAMES

## SPLATOON 2

★★★★★

OUT NOW  
FORMATS SWITCH

**DIRECTORS** Yusuke Amano, Seita Inoue, Shintaro Sato  
**CAST** N/A

**PLOT** Set nine months after the first game's Splatfest event, tournament winner Marie finds that her cousin Callie and the Great Zapfish have gone missing. Suspecting the evil Octarians are responsible, Marie resolves to track them down.

**THE FIRST SPLATOON** was a welcome blast of originality in the often risk-averse (and remaster-obsessed) world of video-game development. A twist on the competitive third-person shooter, it added platform elements and — most interestingly — the ability to turn into a squid.

There was a problem, though. It only existed on the unloved Wii U — a machine that, unlike its predecessor, failed to take the world by storm, or even conjure a light, localised shower. Commercially Nintendo's worst-performing console, it undoubtedly hampered *Splatoon's* momentum. The relative early success of the Switch will hopefully change that for this sequel.

A quick recap: you play as an Inkling, a humanoid equipped with a gun that shoots coloured ink. Once the ink is spread over the playing surface, you can change into a squid to move quickly across the playing arena and climb vertical edges, but travel through enemy ink and you'll slow down as your energy will be sapped. And there are also walkways of grating to watch out for, which wouldn't pose a problem in human form, but you'll slip through them as a cephalopod.

This initially bizarre but ultimately simple premise prompts two styles of gameplay. In single player, *Splatoon 2* leans more heavily on its platforming elements, which require

a tactical approach as you deploy your ink to reach otherwise inaccessible platforms or work out mini-puzzles to transform the environment, such as shooting rotating targets that ratchet out platforms which slowly spring back into place, or inking rolled-up inflatables that spring out into flat, traversable surfaces.

The online side, however, feels far more like the team-based shooter initially promised, with you and your teammates vying to cover as much of each level in your colour of ink as possible, while taking out opponents with your guns, various bombs and grenades, and special weapons.

In terms of gameplay, it doesn't feel that different from the original. Instead, it's slightly better in just about every department, from the expanded campaign to the glossier graphics that really sell the gloopiness of the ink. Just making an unholy mess of its levels is oddly satisfying.

But the most welcome extras are the new objects that have been added, bringing more depth to an already vibrant mix. You may, for example, encounter evil Octarians (the game's tentacled enemies who have kidnapped the Great Zapfish) rolling around in giant bowling balls. Or find yourself sloshing great gobbets of ink around levels using nothing more than a surprisingly effective bucket. But no weapon gives the player an unfair advantage — much balancing work appears to have been done, resulting in a far more level battlefield.

While *Splatoon 2* may feel like it's just an incremental update of the original game, the large number of Switch owners who didn't buy a Wii U means many won't have come across it before. And the original was so good that *Splatoon 2* didn't have to adopt a radical approach. If you're a Switch owner, it's a major title that will bring you vast amounts of fun. **STEVE BOXER**

**VERDICT** Boosted by the extra power of the Switch over the Wii U, *Splatoon 2* is better in almost every department compared with its predecessor. Nintendo has another hit on its (ink-splashed) hands.



## TINY TRAX VR

★★★★★

OUT NOW / PSVR

**DIRECTOR** James Marsden**CAST** N/A

PLAYING *TINY TRAX*, it's tough to shake the feeling that this is what the recent *Micro Machines: World Series* should have been like. It's a VR racing game, where you're placed in a digital world with a track in front of you — you view the action from a fixed position as though you're playing a Scalextric. There aren't a huge number of modes, but mastering the cornering and boosting mechanics of the game is not an easy proposition — there's depth to the gameplay. But what's most heartening is that the development team have clearly set out to make a VR game that isn't just a flat experience made immersive, but one that wouldn't really work played any other way. With the technology still in its infancy, that's something we need to see more often. **JP**



## FINAL FANTASY XII: THE ZODIAC AGE

★★★★★

OUT NOW / PS4

**DIRECTOR** Takashi Katano**CAST** Bobby Edner, Catherine Taber, Gideon Emery, Nicole Fanti

ON ITS INITIAL release in 2006, *Final Fantasy XII* split the series' fanbase with its tweaks to the gameplay that attempted to modernise the turn-based combat system. Although these were ditched soon after, returning to the title more than a decade later it's interesting to see how influential it's been on more recent games in the series. This remaster comes with the customary graphic makeover, but also a re-recorded soundtrack and a 100-stage Trial Mode to further challenge the characters in your party. These only add value to a title that should feel like an anachronism but, because it took such a risky approach when it first came out, actually stands up against the finest JRPGs ever made. An unexpected gem. **SB**



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WORDS NICK DE SEMLYEN, CHRIS HEWITT AND JAMES WHITE  
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# THE CLASS ACTS

# Kingsman

## The Golden Circle

MOST DIRECTORS, WHEN they're talking about sequels, tend to go for the obvious platitudes: bigger, better, faster, stronger, explodier.

Not Matthew Vaughn. When he was making *Kingsman: The Golden Circle*, the follow-up to 2014's audacious, hilarious and button-pushing spy caper *Kingsman: The Secret Service*, he had

a mantra in mind. "If you didn't like the first movie, you'll fucking hate this one," he laughs. "I've made this for people who liked the first film."

Which means they should love this one. And while Vaughn wasn't physically present at Comic-Con this year, there was plenty of evidence

in the footage that his all-star, mostly Oscar-winning cast brought with them to suggest *The Golden Circle* isn't playing it safe, from a gloriously inventive, breakneck car chase-cum-fight scene to evil henchmen being turned into burgers. "It has everything the first one does, but cranked up," says Taron Egerton, who returns as Eggsy, the street kid-turned-gentleman spy. "Matthew loves to surprise. He really loves to piss people off as well. If everyone goes, 'Matthew, you can't do that,' he goes, 'Well, I definitely am.' It's really naughty."

The movie sees Eggsy and Mark Strong's Merlin go on the run after the Kingsman organisation is targeted by Moore's mysterious villain. Their journeys take them to Kentucky, where they happen upon a larger, better-funded sister organisation, Statesman, and its chief agents, Tequila (Channing Tatum), Whiskey (Pedro Pascal), Ginger Ale (Halle Berry) and Champagne (Jeff Bridges). And, along the way, they happen upon Harry Hart (Colin Firth), Eggsy's mentor, who seemingly died in the first movie. While Firth, whose presence in the movie was so under wraps





**Clockwise from left:** At your service, Colin Firth, Taron Egerton and Jeff Bridges; Channing Tatum, Halle Berry and Pedro Pascal; Julianne Moore plays Vaughn's latest villain, Poppy.



that he appeared on call sheets as 'Ben Braddock', still can't talk about the circumstances of the now one-eyed Harry's return, he can ruminate on how Vaughn approaches building a sequel that seems set to constantly surprise. "There's a ramping up, but I think Matthew knows when to pull back and where the edge is," he says. "You can blow it really easily. You just don't do it bloodier, or louder, you do it by creating an expectation and subverting it."

So what of the people who didn't like the first movie; who were baffled by exploding heads set to Elgar, shocked by its church massacre, and appalled by its closing anal sex joke? What's going to grind their gears this time? "There are so many things we're not supposed to talk about," muses Bridges. "But there's a wonderful fingering scene. I haven't used that word, 'fingering', since high school. It's wonderful to have that back."

Mayhem, human burgers and a spot of fingering? That oughta do it.

**KINGSMAN: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 20 SEPTEMBER**



THE BAD GUY

# Ready Player One

Ben Mendelsohn on playing human malware in Steven Spielberg's VR adventure

BEN MENDELSON LOVES Pac-Man. He's a wizard on the pinball table. But when it comes to virtual-reality gaming, his experience amounts to a single session on a horror simulator. "You're in a house and there are goblin-type dudes coming towards you as the lights go out," the Australian actor recalls. "I'd hear a noise — GRAAH! — and look over and there'd be some beast that's advanced." So he got a little scared? "No, I'm not giving you that," he shoots back, fixing *Empire* with a gimlet glare. "I found myself immersed."

Now, with Steven Spielberg's *Ready Player One*, Mendelsohn finds himself back in a VR world, but this time as the baddie. Not a goblin-type dude, mind, but money-grabbing CEO Nolan Sorrento, who's bent on beating plucky teenager Wade Watts (Tye Sheridan) to the prize at the end of a digital treasure hunt: full ownership of the OASIS, the sprawling, massively popular cyber-world in which anything is possible. "I play the guy who runs the hardware division [of mega-corporation Innovative Online Industries]," he says. "And I have an interest in trying to secure the viability of the virtual space, which is free, into a user-pays model. The heroes of the film may have different ideas about that."

Mendelsohn is no stranger to massive blockbusters and A-list directors, having appeared in Ridley Scott's *Exodus: Gods And Kings* and last year's *Rogue One: A Star Wars*

*Story*. But despite his air of unfazeability, he admits that he got starstruck when he was called in to meet "the Boss" for *Ready Player One*. "I got very excited and nervous; I found it hard to look him in the eye," he says. "Steven's created a lot of legendary pop culture. The canon is so huge and so awesome. I love *Saving Private Ryan*. I love *1941*. I'm very, very partial to [the Spielberg-produced] *Poltergeist*, with the girl and the television and the lovely little spirit lady. Part of the joy of Spielberg doing this film is to be able to play in this referencing of pop culture, of which he is a substantial contributor."

Anything can happen inside the OASIS, as is demonstrated by the new trailer, which features Freddy Krueger, the Iron Giant and even the DeLorean from the *Back To The Future* trilogy, which Spielberg also produced. In Ernest Cline's source novel, Sorrento at one point transforms into Mechagodzilla to battle Watts' avatar. While Spielberg's specific take on the story is being kept under wraps, the concept allows for Mendelsohn's villain to take any form he chooses — even, should he so wish, that creepy TV from *Poltergeist*. It's the ultimate playground, and so, Mendelsohn says, was the set of the movie. "I think that this is charting new spots," he concludes. "It's very much an adventure. I expect it to be quite a thrilling ride."

READY PLAYER ONE IS IN CINEMAS FROM  
30 MARCH 2018







CO  
MIC  
CON







## 5 QUESTIONS

# Karen Gillan Michael Rooker Pom Klementieff

### What brings you here?

**Gillan:** We're here to talk about the release of *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol. 2* on Blu-ray in August.

**Rooker:** That's right. And the digital release too.

**Gillan:** Which is on 8 August. Can't remember when the Blu-ray is...

**Rooker:** 22 August.

**Gillan:** That's why he gets paid the big bucks.

**Rooker:** Especially on the Blu-ray, you get 80 minutes of brand-new footage that's never been seen, including a music video.

**Gillan:** It's us dancing around in '70s-inspired costumes, which you need to see.

### Have you been to Comic-Con before?

**Klementieff:** Last year, for the first time.

**Gillan:** I've been here loads of times.

**Rooker:** Yeah, I've been many times.

**Gillan:** I think this is maybe my fifth. Sixth, maybe. I was here for *Doctor Who* for a few years, then I transitioned to the Marvel stuff.

**Rooker:** I've been here 69 times.

**Klementieff:** 69? That's a nice number.

**Rooker:** For some reason, that number keeps popping up in my head. I don't understand it. It's like I'm dreaming 69. I don't know.

**Gillan:** He's going to be 69 next year.

### If you were to cosplay here, who would it be and why?

**Gillan:** A Klingon. A general Klingon. A ginger Klingon.

**Klementieff:** What is it?

**Gillan:** It's a creature from *Star Trek*.

**Rooker:** It's an alien. Can you do the language?

**Gillan:** No.

**Rooker:** I think I'd be a nice, cuddly little kitty. Maybe a kitty with superpowers.

**Klementieff:** I would be Hulk, with huge muscles and really big. And green, yelling at everyone.

**Rooker:** They have suits now. The Hulk cosplayers are some of the most amazing cosplayers. The ones that know how to make the costumes... they look absolutely real.

### Marvel or DC?

**Rooker:** I know what their answers are going to be. Marvel, because they're still getting paid. But me? I'm pretty much dead, right? I can say whatever I want. I'm a free agent. DC or Marvel, I go with the guy who pays me first.

**Gillan:** Marvel, of course. Are you out of your mind?

### Describe Comic-Con in three words.

**Klementieff:** Maybe we can say one word each. "Fun".

**Rooker:** "Excelsior!"

**Gillan:** Is that from *Silver Linings Playbook*?

**Klementieff:** Stan Lee says it all the time.

**Rooker:** [Stan Lee voice] "EXCELSIOR!"

**Gillan:** I'm choosing "escapism".

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY VOL. 2 IS OUT NOW ON  
DOWNLOAD AND ON 22 AUGUST ON DVD AND BLU-RAY



## THE ROUND-UP

# The Marvel Cinematic Universe

The future looks like this

ILLUSTRATION JACEY

MARVEL STUDIOS DIDN'T bring the entire cast of *Avengers: Infinity War* to Comic-Con. Probably because the convention centre isn't big enough. But Marvel chief Kevin Feige did bring footage from the next few MCU films, and dropped a few info-bombs into the bargain...

## THE ORIGINAL WASP

At the end of *Ant-Man*, we see a picture of Janet van Dyne, the original Wasp and wife of Michael Douglas' Hank Pym, long thought lost to the mysterious Quantum Realm. Well, almost — her face was obscured, so Marvel could cast the role down the line. Which they have in style, with Michelle Pfeiffer joining the cast of the currently filming *Ant-Man And The Wasp*. "We used to say, 'It would be great if they go to rescue someone like Michelle Pfeiffer,'" Feige tells *Empire*. "Very recently she said yes." Feige also confirmed the film will feature "heist elements", as Paul Rudd's Scott Lang, Pym and Evangeline Lilly's Hope van Dyne head into the Quantum Realm in search of Janet.

## NINETIES MARVEL

With filming set to start soon on *Captain Marvel*, which will star Brie Larson as the studio's newest superhero (and first solo female lead), Feige teased a few key details. The film will be set in the early 1990s, almost two decades before Tony Stark became Iron Man. "We thought it would be fun to make a film set in that period, and for very specific reasons," says Feige. It's reasonable to assume that Danvers' absence from the MCU to date will be addressed.

## YOUNG FURY AND THE SKRULLS

Two more big revelations about *Captain Marvel*, which will be directed by Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden. The bad guys will be alien shapeshifting menaces the Skrulls, which could set the stage for a major retcon of the MCU post-*Avengers 4*. With their ability to look like *anybody*, there's a fair chance that it may be revealed one or more Avengers have not been who they seem this whole time. Will that apply to Nick Fury? That remains to be seen, but after missing the last few Marvel movies, Samuel L. Jackson will return to the role, with one key difference: this younger Fury won't yet have experienced the incident that leads to him wearing his iconic eyepatch.

## BLACK PANTHER LEAPS INTO ACTION

Ryan Coogler and most of his *Black Panther* cast showed up, along with about five minutes of stylish footage. Highlights included a tense,

James Bondian casino fight sequence which showcases Black Panther's incredible leaping prowess; the revelation that bad guy Erik Killmonger (Michael B. Jordan) has a vibranium suit similar to T'Challa's (Chadwick Boseman); and the debut of Ulysses Klaw's (Andy Serkis) new sonic disruptor arm. It was the first time any of the cast had seen the footage. "This is the film of my dreams," said Daniel Kaluuya, who plays W'Kabi. "It's amazing to see an African story being told in a universe like this."

## AVENGERS: INFINITY WAR LOOKS EPIC

Feige — with help from Chris Hemsworth, Mark Ruffalo, Boseman, Tom Hiddleston and co-director Joe Russo — brought a brief look at *Avengers: Infinity War* that hinted at the enormous scale of the ultimate superhero team-up movie. Starting with a scene in which a wounded Thor meets the Guardians Of The





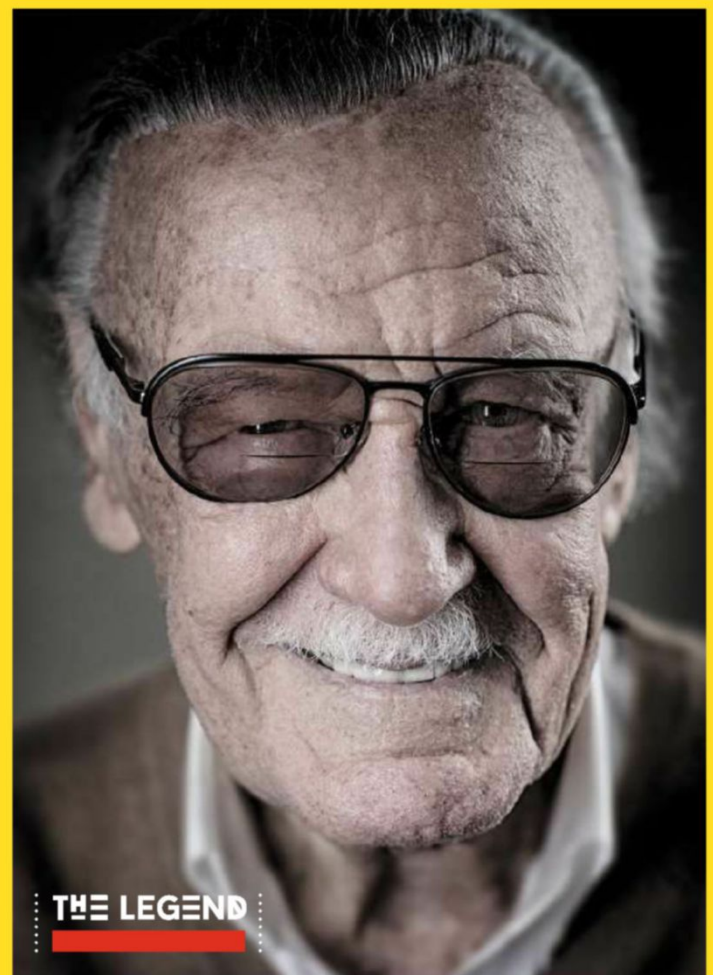


"A Darth Vader for a new generation", Thanos looms large in the ever-expanding Marvel universe.

Galaxy, it went on to feature almost every single Avenger, including Chris Evans' Captain America with a beard. It also included shots of a bloodied Spider-Man (Tom Holland) and a screaming Thor having his head clamped by Thanos (Josh Brolin). "It's an intense film," confirms Russo. "There's certainly a lot of humour as well. That's probably the hardest job we have on this movie, balancing the tone."

### THANOS MEANS BUSINESS

"Frankly, *Avengers 3* is Thanos' movie," says Russo of the purple prick who's targeting Earth's mightiest heroes in *Infinity War*. The footage ended with Thanos turning a nearby moon into a fireball of comets, all the better to chuck them at the Avengers. "That's one of many things Thanos does in this film," laughs Russo. "He's an incredible threat. We're hoping to make a Darth Vader for a new generation."



THE LEGEND

# Stan Lee

**Outside: Lee-mania. Inside: Comic-Con's spiritual godfather is checking up on us**

STAN LEE HAS something to get off his chest. "Most people who write the word 'comicbook' write it as two words," he says. "Don't ever let them do that again. When you do that, it means a 'funny book'. That's not what comicbooks necessarily are. No, it's a comicbook. One word! You see to it. I will check on you later."

If anyone is qualified to know how comic boo — sorry, comicbook — should be spelled, it's Lee. In a blur of creativity during the '60s that rivalled The Beatles' output around the same time, this is the man who co-created the likes of Spider-Man, the X-Men, the Hulk, the Fantastic Four, Daredevil, the Avengers and more. Without him, comicbooks would probably still be an underground concern. Without him, you could argue, there wouldn't even be a Comic-Con. Talking to *Empire* in his two-floor suite at a San Diego hotel, Lee shies away from a statement so all-encompassing. "I wouldn't say that. The Comic-Con

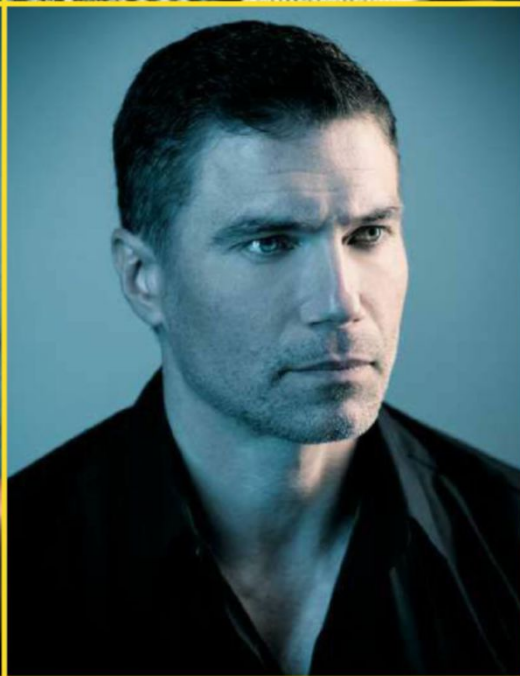
is really a product of all the work that everybody does in the comicbook business. It's a pop-culture thing, more than just comics. Of course, comics are at the head of pop culture. Don't you forget it!"

Now 94, Lee was recently bereaved by the loss of his wife of 69 years, Joan. But he's still a force of nature, and around the halls and corridors of the Con, he's very much The Man. During our interview, Michael Rooker shows up to pay his respects, bellowing Lee's catchphrase, "Excelsior!", and kissing the elder gentleman on the forehead. When he goes outside, it's Lee-mania. So, what's it like being Stan Lee at Comic-Con? "I'll show you why I'm such a good interview," he deadpans. "It's nice." All hail the king of comicbooks.

**FOR MORE FROM STAN LEE, CHECK OUT THE EMPIRE PODCAST AT [EMPIREONLINE.COM/PODCAST](http://EMPIREONLINE.COM/PODCAST)**



COMIC  
CON





# THE ROYAL FAMILY: Marvel's Inhumans

The latest Marvel superheroes (and villains) to smash the small screen

**MARVEL'S INHUMANS** HAS had something of an interesting journey to the small screen. The property, which explores the political intrigue at the heart of a family of super-powered enhanced (don't call them mutants, mainly for legal reasons) beings, was initially announced as a movie; part of Marvel Studios' post-*Avengers: Infinity War* phase. Then it got shifted to TV, where it appears to have been reimagined as *The Crown* with capes. But who are the Inhumans? Let's ask them.

## ANSON MOUNT IS **BLACK BOLT**

The king of the Inhumans, Black Bolt — full name, Blackagar Boltagon, no-shit fans — is blessed with a voice that can level cities, so he doesn't speak. Call him Marvel Marceau. "I adore the character. It's so well-written, in the sense that he's a leader who understands the power of his own voice. He's become a stoic and a leader who's bearing a lot of secrets. He doesn't realise that he's conflated his reserve as a leader with an emotional removal."

## SERINDA SWAN IS **MEDUSA**

Black Bolt's queen, Medusa gets her name from the monster of Greek mythology, a nod to her sentient hair that can attack opponents. She's a cut above. "If you look at a lot of the comics, we're the heroes, the villains, we're in-between — you're not sure. We go all over the map. And so it wasn't so much trying to encompass all of her past. It was taking a slice out of her life that is the Inhumans in this circumstance, and doing the best you can to represent that."

## IWAN RHEON IS **MAXIMUS**

The former Ramsay Bolton heads straight into another game of thrones as Black Bolt's ambitious, and possibly treacherous, younger brother. "He's become known as Maximus The Mad. But he's not mad; he's sort of a revolutionary, forward-thinking politician who wants to change things for the better of the people and for his



Lockjaw, the giant teleporting dog. Below: Medusa and Maximus get up close and personal.



own personal gain. So Max The Antagonist is more accurate — it's not alliteration but that's the sort of thing we were going for."

## MIKE MOH IS **TRITON**

A green, finned Inhuman, Triton is a dab webbed hand when it comes to fighting the good fight underwater.

"The main thing I wanted to portray is that Triton is fiercely loyal. Anything that Black Bolt said to me, I would put my life on it. Anything for the safety and betterment of our family. It helps when you like the people you hang out with — I haven't known them long, but I consider everyone family. We became a real unit."

## EME IKWUAKOR IS **GORGON**

Another Greek-themed Inhuman, Gorgon is possessed of two hooves, all the better for stomping the bad guys

"Gorgon is always acting on impulse. It sounds weird, but every single day I would get injured — purposefully! I always had to feel that I had to

push my body to the limit, because that's what Gorgon would do. It got to a point where I would be like, 'I feel like eating boulders today.'"

## KEN LEUNG IS **KARNAK**

An Inhuman who has the uncanny ability to see the fault in everything, from opponent's strategies and powers to the third act of *Baby Driver*.

"The series is very, very dark. It's like one shade of black from beginning to end. My role is also more physically demanding than any I've ever played. So that together with the darkness has made the character a little hard to catch. I'm always trying to catch it."

## SONYA BALMORES IS **AURAN**

The fiercely loyal head of the Royal Guard, tasked with protecting Black Bolt and his kin from harm.

"She's really close to the family. Like a personal assistant — you see the good, the bad and the ugly. I did some work as a personal assistant once, so I had a lot to work from."

## ISABELLE CORNISH IS **CRYSTAL**

An Elemental, Crystal can control earth, wind and fire — and other '70s soul groups.

"She's the youngest member of the Royal Family, so I got to bring in an element of youth. Being the youngest, as well, I haven't experienced my powers as long, so there's that journey of trying out her powers, which was really nice."

## ELLEN WOGLOM IS **LOUISE**

A character created just for the TV show. Not much is known about her. Louise may not even be her real name.

"My character brings a levity to the show. She doesn't try to be funny, but her personality is one where she takes her job really seriously and sometimes that's humorous. Man, there's so much I can't say. I don't even know why I'm here!"

THE FIRST EPISODE OF *MARVEL'S INHUMANS* IS SHOWING ON IMAX SCREENS FROM 1 SEPTEMBER, WITH THE SERIES COMING TO TV AT A LATER DATE.



CO  
MIC  
CON







## 5 QUESTIONS

# Elijah Wood

### What brings you here?

*Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency.* We're in the middle of the new season and resume shooting on Monday. There are a lot of Douglas Adams devotees around so we had a built-in audience, in that regard, but I think people really fell in love with the show in its own right, which is great. It's a crazy show — funny but gritty and intense — and it gets even weirder in the second season.

### Which of your characters is biggest at Comic-Con?

I mean, it would be Frodo Baggins. I haven't actually been out amongst anything so far, so I've not seen any cosplay at all, but I've seen my fair share of Hobbit costumes. What I'm starting to see over the last few years are Wirt and Greg from *Over The Garden Wall*. It's a really beautiful animated mini-series that I did on Cartoon Network. And I see a lot of people dressed up as those characters, which is kinda cool.

### What's the weirdest experience you've had here?

The very first time I came to Comic-Con, I went to this very strange little costume ball with a couple of the *Lord Of The Rings* actors. It didn't really represent the typical cosplay of Comic-Con. It was kind of its own thing. In my mind it was slightly fetishistic, but not in a weird, dark way. It wasn't *Eyes Wide Shut*. We were only there for an hour or so. It's a vague memory now, which is wonderful. It's like, "Was that a fever dream? Did that happen?"

### If you were cosplaying here, who would you dress as?

A couple of years ago I walked the floor in a Michael Myers from *Halloween* mask. I managed to stay undercover that time, but my first attempt to disguise myself at Comic-Con was really poor. It was just a mask that covered my eyes and people started to work it out. But if I was going to cosplay, I think I'd go as Rorschach from *Watchmen*.

### Describe Comic-Con in three words.

Waiting. Sweaty. Ecstatic.

**DIRK GENTLY'S HOLISTIC DETECTIVE AGENCY**  
SEASON 2 IS ON NETFLIX LATER THIS YEAR



# Bright

Will Smith and friends brief us on their fantasy/cop mash-up

PORTRAIT JOHN RUSSO

THE LAST TIME director David Ayer came to Comic-Con, in 2015, it was straight from the set of *Suicide Squad* without grabbing even a single Z. "I was fucking shooting, I jumped on a plane, and they dragged me over," he recalls, unhappy at the memory. This year, it's different. "I've gotten some sleep lately. It's novel and I recommend it."

It's not just Ayer — the entire *Bright* crew is on ebullient form, not least Will Smith, who accuses Joel Edgerton of grabbing his ass during *Empire*'s shoot, later asking, "Anyone got a tissue? David made me laugh and cry and mess up my eyes." They're in town for a sneak preview of their gritty, LA-set fairy tale, described as *Training Day* meets *The Lord Of The Rings*. "Meets *Forrest Gump* meets *Porky's II*," chimes in Edgerton.

Smith plays Ward, an LAPD cop. Edgerton is Jakoby, his new partner — and the very first non-human to join the force. *Bright* is set in a parallel reality where fantasy creatures co-exist with humans, but not always happily, and Jakoby's orc is treated with suspicion, even by his new co-worker. "As a black dude, you just don't get a lot of movies where you're the racist," says Smith. "It's rugged and powerful and really bizarre for me to be on the other side of that."

Ayer deliberately cast four non-Americans to play the primary non-humans: Lucy Fry (elf Tikka) is Australian, like Edgerton; Noomi Rapace (power-suited elf villain Lila) is Swedish; Édgar Ramírez (flamboyant elf Kandomere) hails from Venezuela. The quartet got a radical makeover. "I was fighting against the contact lenses and teeth at the beginning," admits Rapace. "But it's amazing how quickly you adapt." They also underwent some offbeat prep. "David told me to climb a mountain and say this elvish prayer ten times at the top," remembers Fry.

With its A-list pedigree and budget, *Bright* is Netflix's biggest original movie yet. Ayer says he's not had this much creative control since his first film, *Harsh Times*, back in 2005. "It's kind of a daring movie," he says. "It has all these fantasy creatures, but they still pay their bills on time, love their families and try to live their lives. It becomes this incredible template to study the social issues we're having right now."

Orc cop Nick Jakoby (Joel Edgerton) with human partner Daryl Ward (Will Smith).



BRIGHT IS ON NETFLIX FROM 22 DECEMBER





From left to right:  
David Ayer, Noomi  
Rapace, Edgar  
Ramírez, Lucy Fry,  
Will Smith and  
Joel Edgerton.



THE FAREWELL

# Doctor Who

**Peter Capaldi (and friends)  
reflects on the 12th Doctor's  
wildest adventures**

PETER CAPALDI'S DOCTOR still has one journey to make: the Christmas special airing this December. But with Jodie Whittaker confirmed as the next occupant of the TARDIS, it's the end of an era for both Capaldi and showrunner Steven Moffat, who got to navigate through time and space together for just over three years. As they prepared to bid farewell to thousands of fans at Comic-Con, we sat them down together, plus guest writer and Christmas special co-star Mark Gatiss, to hear their memories of some key Capaldi episodes.

## DEEP BREATH

(SERIES 8, EPISODE 1)

**In which the freshly formed 12th Doctor is startled by his new, craggier face. Specifically the "attack eyebrows".**

**Capaldi:** Steven is a hugely gifted writer, obviously, but one of his quirks is that he loves to put in cheeky remarks that he would never say to your face. Matt Smith was blessed by the gods with a generous chin. So Steven liked to have >









the companions make remarks about 'Chin Boy'. With me it was the eyebrows.

**Moffat:** Matt actually came around to my house when he was first being cast as the Doctor and my son Louie, who was tiny, went, "You've got a big chin." Matt said, "I like to think of it as a square jaw." And he said, "No, it's big." I think your eyebrows are very funny.

**Capaldi:** He also described me as running like a penguin with his ass on fire. Which I do.

## MUMMY ON THE LOOSE

(SERIES 8, EPISODE 8)

**The Doctor goes full Poirot and solves a murder mystery on a moving locomotive.**

**Capaldi:** I love the episode because it was the first time my Doctor was revealed to be quite heroic. You discover that he'd put himself in the position of being consumed by the mummy, which I thought was very brave. The monster was great too.

**Moffat:** I said at the meeting, "Forget all the mummy movies — they get it right in *Scooby-Doo*."

**Capaldi:** Monsters tend to smell of sweat, but he actually smelled of talcum powder, which was nice.

**Gatiss:** Who's to say that mummies didn't talk?

## SL P NO MOR

(SERIES 9, EPISODE 9)

**The Doctor winds up on a space station that's been orbiting Neptune, plagued by Sandmen — creatures made of sleepy-dust.**

**Gatiss:** I feel like found-footage horror has been a bit overdone, but not on television. The constraints of it were fascinating: everything has to be from someone's point of view.

**Capaldi:** If you look really closely at the corridors in the episode, the bottoms are lined with this mechanical-looking thing. I examined it on set and it turned out to be Ikea cutlery drawers. They'd obviously bought 20 of them and screwed them on. I love that stuff.

## H AV N S NT

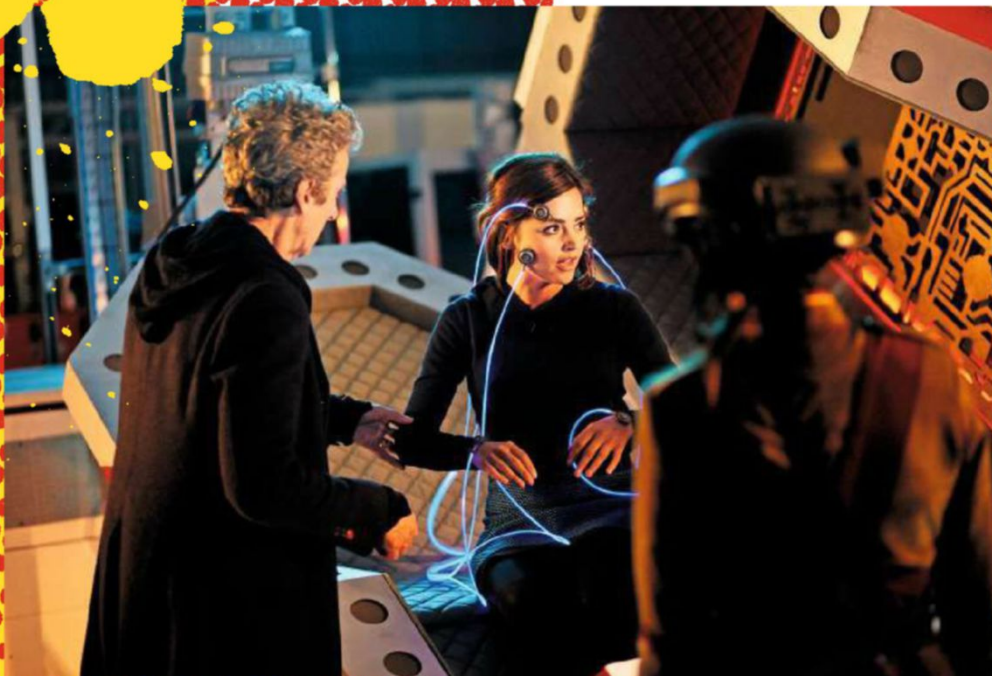
(SERIES 9, EPISODE 11)

**A one-man show of an episode, in which the Doctor is trapped in a mysterious castle on a seemingly endless time-loop.**

**Moffat:** I was watching Peter holding court one day and thought, "You could spend 55 minutes with the Doctor just talking to himself."







**Clockwise from left:**  
A change is gonna come for Steven Moffat, Peter Capaldi and Mark Gatiss; The Doctor and Clara (Jenna Coleman) in 'Sleep No More'; The Doctor with his first incarnation (David Bradley) in this year's Christmas special, 'Twice Upon A Time'.

**Gatiss:** I remember you saying it was the most ridiculous read-through there's ever been. We could have done it in a hotel room.

**Moffat:** It was just Peter acting and me barking the stage directions. So two middle-aged Scotsmen shouting at each other for an hour, with a bunch of people watching.

**Gatiss:** Like Glasgow High Street at two in the morning.

## WORLD ENOUGH AND TIME

(SERIES 10, EPISODE 11)

**In which the Mondasian Cybermen return — and the characters debate whether the Doctor's real name is 'Doctor Who'.**

**Moffat:** If you're going to take continuity seriously, as anyone who discusses these matters must, his name is Doctor Who. It was absolutely mentioned in [1966 four-parter] *The War Machines*. Twice.

**Capaldi:** Also, you know, people don't shout, "The Doctor!" at you in the street. They go, "Hey, Doctor Who! Where's your TARDIS?" I love calling him Doctor Who. It noises people up.

**Moffat:** It's the first article of faith for fans, isn't

it? Go around the playground condemning yourself to virginity for a few decades by saying, "Actually, it's *the Doctor*..."

## TWICE UPON A TIME

**The yet-to-be-aired final instalment, in which Capaldi's Doctor meets his very first iteration, before finally regenerating.**

**Moffat:** We've finished shooting it, but really, really recently. It's still a work in progress.

**Capaldi:** I couldn't have wanted for a more moving and emotional end to my time as Doctor Who. It is strange doing [the regeneration scene], but in a way you've been practising all your life to collapse on the floor of the TARDIS. Or whatever happens! And we had a whole day to do it, which was nice.

**Gatiss:** It's amazing, you can see the footage of [fourth Doctor] Tom Baker turning into [fifth Doctor] Peter Davidson — it was literally like a minute ten that they had to do it. It was an extraordinary contrast: a day to do it, versus, "Get in! Do it!"

**TWICE UPON A TIME AIRS ON BBC ONE ON 25 DECEMBER**



## THE ROUND-UP

# The DC Extended Universe

All the Batscoops and Superclues from the hero-stuffed panel

ILLUSTRATION JACEY

WITH THE RECORD-BREAKING commercial (not to mention critical) success of *Wonder Woman* giving both Warner Bros. and DC a boost, the companies brought their big guns to Comic-Con, putting Ben Affleck (Batman), Ezra Miller (*The Flash*), Gal Gadot (*Wonder Woman*) and Jason Momoa (*Aquaman*) on stage to talk *Justice League*, *Aquaman* and more, including indications that the DC Extended Universe is about to get pretty darn big.

## COMING ATTRACTIONS

Following this year's *Justice League* and next year's *Aquaman*, Warner Bros. has another eight DCEU movies in the works. *Shazam* is due for April 2019, while *Wonder Woman 2* will follow that in December 2019. Also coming, but currently undated, are Joss Whedon's *Batgirl*, Matt Reeves' *The Batman*, *Suicide Squad 2*, *Green Lantern Corps* and *Justice League Dark*. Previously announced, but now noticeably absent, is a standalone Cyborg movie.

## UNDERSEA BATTLES

The Ocean Master, played by Patrick Wilson (who had a voice cameo as the US President in *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*), will be Aquaman's main nemesis. And he's not messing around. The Atlantean king's half brother, he's after the throne and has an entire fleet of ships at his disposal. But they're ships with a difference — these travel *beneath* the waves.

## BATMOBILE 2.0

Batman may be down one super-powered ally (there's still no footage of Superman in *Justice League*), but he's tooling up in other ways. Most notably with his hardware-boosted Batmobile which is now visibly better armed (missiles! machine guns!) than it was in *BvS*.

## FLASH FORWARD

As so many trailers are at pains to tell us these days — we need to forget everything we thought we knew. Because The Flash's standalone film (due 2020) has a tantalising title — *The Flash: Flashpoint* — that hints at a surprising future for the DCEU. The 'Flashpoint' run in the comics saw The Flash travel back in time, drastically changing the

present with his actions. Could the DCEU be set for a reboot in as little as three years' time?

## BORN TO BE WILD

We've finally had our first glimpse of Steppenwolf (Ciaran Hinds), the main villain in *Justice League*. Hinted at in a deleted *BvS* scene (as Lex Luthor examined the archives of the crashed Kryptonian ship) he will lead an invasion of Earth. Which, as shown in the trailer, includes attacking Wonder Woman's home Themyscira and doing battle with the Amazonians.

## SUPERMAN RETURNS

The question isn't really, "Will Superman appear in *Justice League*?" but, "How long will he be in *Justice League* for?" Killed off to give Bruce







With the addition of Cyborg, The Flash and Aquaman, the DC Extended Universe is growing at a supersonic rate.

Wayne the impetus needed to gather a team of heroes to fight together, it's been confirmed Superman will be in the film, and there's speculation he first reveals himself to Alfred (Jeremy Irons) based on the latest trailer. But it's not that straightforward...

### THE FUTURE'S GREEN

...because the reflection in Alfred's glasses in the scene in question is green. As in Green Lantern. Steppenwolf hints the cosmic heroes are gone ("No protectors here. No Lanterns. No Kryptonian"), but could Warner Bros. be about to drop a surprise?

**JUSTICE LEAGUE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 17 NOVEMBER.**  
**AQUAMAN IS IN CINEMAS FROM 5 OCTOBER 2018.**



# Krypton

## Superman prequel TV series escapes the Phantom Zone

A TV SHOW about Superman's granddad might not sound instantly appealing, conjuring up images of a doddering coddler in an S-embazoned cardigan flying around bingo halls. But fear not: this isn't Old Man Of Steel. Instead, *Krypton* rewinds the clock to 200 years before the destruction of Kal-El's home planet, showing how his pop-pop Seyg-El grappled with immense challenges of his own. "Clark Kent had the benefit of growing up on Kent Farm, this beautiful place where he's accepted and loved," says star Cameron Cuffe. "Seyg grows up in a society that's leaning hard towards authoritarianism. He's much more of a rogue than Superman. A bit more angry, wily, street-smart."

Showrunners Damian Kindler and Cameron Welsh are excited to delve into the fantastical world of Krypton — the brief glimpse of the planet we got in *Man Of Steel* was

considered by many to be the highlight of that film. "It's such a rich stew," Welsh says. "It's an alien world and looks nothing like Earth."

Expect epic vistas, scary creatures, cool spacecraft, time-travel and, judging by the recent trailer, lots of fighting involving curvy bladey things. "There's an advanced martial art that the Military Guild guys are trained in," says Cuffe of the elite force charged with safeguarding Kryptonian capital Kandor. "But for Seyg, everything he knows about fighting he's learned the hard way, from growing up on the streets. His best advantage is his mind."

One other thing you can expect: the unexpected. "Characters from the DC Universe you won't anticipate being there will be there," hints Kindler. *Batman v Superman's* Grandpa? You heard it here first.

**KRYPTON WILL AIR IN 2018**



## 5 QUESTIONS

# Peter Serafinowicz

### Have you been to Comic-Con before?

Yes, I have. Bizarrely, it was for the DVD release of *Look Around You*, the blockbuster BBC eight-to-ten-minute-episode cult series that is beloved by its small but loyal bunch of followers. We did a panel and there wasn't far off a thousand people there. I was just surprised that a thousand people ever even watched it.

### What brings you here?

*The Tick*. It's a show for Amazon and it's created by Ben Edlund, and I play The Tick. He's a blue superhero, and it was a comic book, a cartoon series and a live-action series a few years ago starring Patrick Warburton. They were quite big shoes to fill. No, they were quite uncomfortable shoes to fill.

### Who's the most famous person you've crossed paths with so far?

I just bumped into Alfie Allen. Probably 20 years ago we worked together when he was ten. We did a pilot that was written by Matt Lucas, David Walliams and Robert Popper called *You Are Here*. I haven't seen him since, except on screen. I'm a huge *Game Of Thrones* fan. We filmed this thing up in the Lake District and I taught him how to do a Michael Caine impression. I just got his number now and I can't wait to catch up with him later on. It's always good to see one of my pupils doing so well.

### Which of your characters is biggest at Comic-Con?

I guess it's The Tick. Otherwise, Darth Maul is still probably the one. *Star Wars*, despite my really miniscule involvement in that, still lingers.

### Marvel or DC?

Marvel. Why? Fuck you! None of your business!

**THE TICK IS ON AMAZON PRIME VIDEO  
FROM 25 AUGUST**



The Tick (Peter Serafinowicz) fails his driving test.







# Welcome To Hall H

**Empire spends a day in the legendary arena. And lives to tell the tale. Kinda**

**SATURDAY 22 JULY, 11:18AM** — Hall H, right at the end of the San Diego Convention Centre, is the place where Hollywood shows off its wares to the Comic-Con massive. And massive is about right — it's a CostCo of cinema, a Glasto of geekery, that can host 6,500 people, many of whom have camped out all night to try to get in for the Con's biggest day.

**11:30AM** — Warner Bros. are first up with their signature move: giant screens that wrap around the hall.

**11:39AM** — Ready for *Ready Player One*? Here comes former *Empire* editor Sir Steven of Spielberg. It's only his second visit to the Con, but he knows the drill: don't come empty-handed. He's brought the teaser for his pop culture-tastic film, a visual treat featuring cameos from Freddy Krueger, the Iron Giant, the *Back To The Future* DeLorean and more. The crowd accept his offering.

**12:06PM** — Next is *Blade Runner 2049*, which kicks off with a holographic Jared Leto. Harrison Ford soon follows, looking like he wishes he'd taken the hologram option, too.

**12:21PM** — As the DC panel begins with *Aquaman* himself, Jason Momoa, racing through the crowd to take the stage, we break into our first snack. Not, sadly, an aquaflam.

**12:45PM** — Comic-Con: the only place on Earth where a man dressed as Wonder Woman can ask a question of the actual Wonder Woman, Gal Gadot. Never change, Hall H.

**2:30PM** — Three hours in. Sunlight is but a rumour.

**3:29PM** — *Stranger Things* is happening on stage, with the debut of the new season 2 trailer, soundtracked to Michael Jackson's *Thriller*. The '80s vibe continues with the kids in *Ghostbusters* costume. And stranger things are happening off stage, too — a bloke dressed as streaky bacon walks past.

**4:45PM** — The cast and creatives of *Westworld* talk up Season 2, bringing some early teases including Dolores (Evan Rachel Wood) gunning down people while on horseback.

**5:30PM** — The Marvel Studios panel is scheduled to begin. Anticipation is at fever pitch. The only thing that could dampen spirits would be Marvel president Kevin Feige striding on and telling everyone to go home.

**5:50PM** — Feige doesn't do that. Instead, he brings out the teams behind *Thor: Ragnarok* and *Black Panther*, with exclusive footage galore. The biggest cheer may be reserved for Jeff Goldblum, though, making his first Con appearance.

**6:55PM** — During the *Avengers: Infinity War* footage, the crowd welcomes each character reveal with earsplitting screams that would give Paul McCartney a serious dose of Beatlemania flashbacks.

**7:00PM** — And that's that. Seven-and-a-half hours after entering, we stagger blinking into the sunlight like Andy Dufresne after his escape from Shawshank. But better than Andy Dufresne, because he hadn't even seen any *Avengers: Infinity War* footage.



THE NEXT GENERATION

# Star Trek Discovery

The crew of the new sci-fi series  
brief us on their characters

**BEFORE COMIC-CON**, *Star Trek: Discovery* — the first new *Trek* series in more than a decade — was shrouded in the kind of secrecy that would frustrate a Ferengi. We knew it takes place before the events of the original series — Kirk, Spock et al — and that it would embrace diversity and inclusivity even more openly than *Trek*, a show famous for both, had in the past. But we knew little about its characters, until its principal cast beamed up to the *Empire* studio...

**SONEQUA MARTIN-GREEN** — FIRST OFFICER  
**MICHAEL BURNHAM**

"Michael's a xenanthropologist and she studies other things too — you'll see! She's an incredibly flawed but incredibly principled woman. There's the Vulcan way of life, which she learns from her surrogate father, Sarek, but then there's also the principles of Starfleet that she truly lives by. And so you see these ideologies clashing. Usually in *Star Trek* we see everyone at their stations on the bridge, doing what they need to be doing. But in our story we get to see everything that happens in their quarters and around the rest of the ship. It's almost an upstairs/downstairs story, because you see the turmoil everyone is having to transcend to do what they need to do."

**DOUG JONES** — LIEUTENANT SARU

"I'm a Kelpien, a species which, on their planet, is at the bottom of the food chain. So you might think that my kind are fearful and frail and victims. Not so. If you've ever seen a prey species in the wild, they've got great survival instincts and when put into a corner they can kick. You will find out as the season evolves that that's very much Saru. I've played so many alien species over the 30 years I've been acting, and coming up with a new physicality is the challenge. For Saru I wear hoof-feet boots that push my posture into a place I'd never been before. My arms swing from side to side instead of forward and back. And I have an interesting walk — I based it on Claudia Schiffer."







The cast of *Star Trek: Discovery*.  
Below: Captain Philippa Georgiou (Michelle Yeoh) and First Officer Michael Burnham.

## JAMES FRAIN — SAREK

"We know from other *Star Trek* stories where Sarek ends up [he's Spock's father]. Here, we're exploring where he starts. He becomes the mentor for Michael, because her family were guests at a Vulcan event that was bombed by the Klingons, killing her parents. With Michael, and Sarek's human wife, there's all this humanity, and feelings, which are always a problem for Vulcans."

## SHAZAD LATIF — LIEUTENANT TYLER

"You meet my character as a prisoner of war. He's been through some horrible things. There's a lot of emotional pain there. As he goes back on to the *Discovery*, he tries to find some normality and that's very hard to do. That's his journey."

## MARY WISEMAN — CADET TILLY

"Tilly is a very green banana. She's in her final year at the Starfleet Academy and is working on the *Discovery* in a kind of unpaid-internship capacity. It's a great assignment but she's pretty isolated. Through happenstance she's assigned to the same room as Michael and they form an unlikely friendship. Then she works in engineering under Lieutenant Stamets and they have a very different relationship. She's a very sensitive girl with a big heart, but isn't super-socially-savvy."

## ANTHONY RAPP — SCIENCE OFFICER LIEUTENANT STAMETS

"Stamets is a research scientist who got scooped up by Starfleet. He's researching astromycology — space-mushrooms. The *Discovery* is actually kind of built around the project that I'm working on, but I can't go into more detail, because it would give away too much. My character is named after a real mycologist — Paul Stamets — and I saw a TED Talk he did about mushrooms and how they could literally save our world from ecological disaster. It was inspiring."

**STAR TREK: DISCOVERY IS ON NETFLIX FROM 25 SEPTEMBER.**





## 5 QUESTIONS

# Adam Wingard

### What brings you here?

We just finished *Death Note*. The paint's not dried on it yet — it's about as fresh as a movie gets. And we're here to get the word out. This is the first year I've come to Comic-Con where I've not been filming at the time, so I'm going to actually be able to enjoy it.

### Who's the most famous person you've crossed paths with today?

Hmm... let's see. I haven't come across many super-famous people because I'm always being shuffled from one area to the next. This morning I did walk past John Cho. Our moderator this morning was Terry Crews. But that's about the extent of it. Will Smith was apparently in the green room backstage shadow-boxing, but I missed that. That would have been the most famous person I've ever met.

### What are you most excited about here that you're not involved in?

I'm excited about the *Blade Runner* thing coming out, but right now in terms of things that I'm engaged with, *Twin Peaks* is the only thing that matters in my life. I don't think David Lynch is going to be at the panel, but if he was here that would be the end-all. I've been dreaming a lot about David Lynch, weirdly. I don't know what's going on. That's why I like that show, because it's doing something to my brain. I dreamed two nights ago that David Lynch and I were confessing our love to each other, and it was pretty powerful. I woke up feeling, "Bummer. I had this real connection to David Lynch and now I don't."

### If you were cosplaying here, what would you be dressed as?

Probably something really easy to do. Even though Hallowe'en is my favourite holiday of the year, I have a phobia about dressing up. When I was three or four years old, I remember my mum dressed me up as Superman and put balloons in my shirt to make muscles. I remember feeling really humiliated, and I don't think I've dressed up for Hallowe'en since.

### Describe Comic-Con in three words.

I am overwhelmed.

DEATH NOTE IS ON NETFLIX FROM 25 AUGUST



Above: Director Adam Wingard.  
Below: *Death Note*'s demonic god Ryuk, played by Willem Dafoe.



Set design and build: Arthur Martinot.  
Special thanks to Nicholas Tooman, Victor Rodriguez and Nora Schneider



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A dynamic illustration of Thor, the Norse god of thunder, running forward with a determined expression. He is wearing his iconic Asgardian armor, which is dark with silver and gold accents, and a red cape that flows behind him. His right arm is raised, and his left hand is clenched in a fist. He is running over the large, 3D, metallic blue and yellow letters of the word "RAAGNA". The background is a dark, atmospheric scene with a bright, glowing light source at the top, creating a lens flare effect. The overall style is reminiscent of comic book art, with bold colors and dramatic lighting.

# RAAGNA






**ROCK**

*12* *Koii*

THOR'S BACK (WITH A FRIEND FROM WORK) IN HIS MOST COSMIC, COMEDIC AND CRAZY ADVENTURE YET. ALL HEADED UP BY HUNT FOR THE WILDERPEOPLE'S TAIKA WAITITI

WORDS DAN JOLIN





**RAGNAROK**, IN CASE you don't know your Norse coda, means The End Of All Things. And Things certainly don't appear to be going well for Thor Odinson right now. When *Empire* arrives on the set of *Thor: Ragnarok* at Village Roadshow Studios in Oxenford, Australia, on 20 August 2016, we find the thunder-bending Avenger doing battle with his latest, deadliest foe: Hela, Goddess Of Death. It is fair to say he's getting his Asgardian arse kicked.

They are fighting, it turns out, amid the swirling, interdimensional turmoil of the Bifrost — that handy, hyper-spacey bridge between worlds. Which is why actors Chris Hemsworth (in leather battle armour, his mighty hammer Mjolnir noticeably missing) and Cate Blanchett (in fractal-decorated mo-cap gear, which allows for an all-CGI Hela outfit that'll twist, morph and weaponise itself on screen) are both suspended 14 metres above the crash-mat-covered soundstage floor. Each is strapped into a state-of-the-art 'tuning fork' rig that enables them to twist in the air like gravity-defying Cirque du Soleil acrobats. A quartet of vertically strobing lighting-rig towers hits them with a storm of flashes, while a wind machine sends Hemsworth's blond mane whipping wildly out behind his head.


Hemsworth swings at Blanchett but she bats his arm away, rakes furiously at his face and closes a black-fingernailed hand around his throat. Suddenly a voice rings out over the epic fray, its clipped, amiable Kiwi tones amplified by the studio's god-mic. "Ah, Cate? You're gonna have to really strangle him, mate," it says.

"Really?" Blanchett calls back.

"You're barely touching his neck, m'dear."

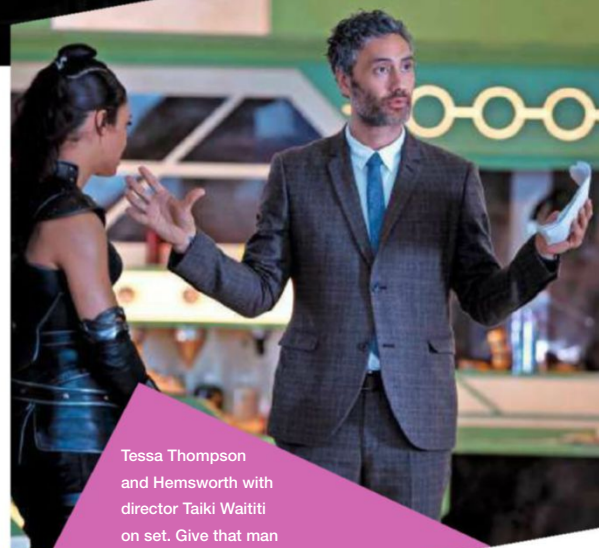
"He keeps moving away," she mock-complains, but her director is politely insistent: "I wanna feel scared for Chris."

It's not easy to imagine the director of the third stand-alone Thor adventure being scared — or even mildly bothered — by much. A short distance from the furious, fantastical action, Taika Waititi resides in the Taika Waititi



equivalent of a video village. There's no mere director's chair perched behind his monitors. Instead, the creator of last year's joyous indie crowd-pleaser *Hunt For The Wilderpeople* reclines serenely on a red-and-gold divan, surrounded by colourfully embroidered cushions and beanbags. This is less a monitoring station than a chill-out zone; a cosy oasis plonked right in the middle of the Hollywood blockbuster factory floor. "You gotta make it comfortable," Waititi says matter-of-factly. "Cause otherwise you're just looking at scaffolding and blue-screen all day long."

Between set-ups, he plays music over the god-mic. This morning, he's selected The Beatles' *Let It Be* and, with uncanny appropriateness, *Across The Universe* cues up. As Lennon sings, "Nothing's gonna change my world," production designer Dan Hennah (veteran of all six Peter



Tessa Thompson and Hemsworth with director Taika Waititi on set. Give that man a baseball cap!





Thor (Chris Hemsworth) and eternal mischief-maker Loki (Tom Hiddleston) reunited.



Jeff Goldblum's Grandmaster with guard Topaz (Hunt For The Wilderpeople's Rachel House).



Jackson Middle-earth movies) chuckles. "It's refreshing to see this huge machine isn't changing *his* world," he says, nodding towards Waititi.

The same can hardly be said for Waititi's lead character. Or for the series which bears his name. For Thor, *Ragnarok* is *all* about change. Why else would Marvel Studios hire someone like Waititi?

## WHEN EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Brad Winderbaum was considering who he'd most like to see directing the new *Thor*, he listed the movies he'd enjoyed most during the previous year. At the top was a little mock-doc vampire movie set in Wellington, New Zealand, titled *What We Do In The Shadows*. Co-directed by Kiwi filmmaker Taika Waititi (who also stars as prissy, lovelorn bloodsucker Viago), it's a deft, improvisation-driven horror comedy with a sweet centre. Just to be sure, the producer checked out Waititi's previous movie, a father-son heartwarmer named *Boy* which features Michael Jackson tributes and — hello — a reference to the Incredible Hulk. That's when he decided to bring him in.

"We needed a really cool filmmaker to take the franchise in a bold new direction," says Winderbaum. "When he met with me and Kevin [Feige, the Marvel Studios boss] it was clear in that room he was our guy." You could be forgiven for wondering why Waititi would choose to leave his low-budget, New Zealand-rooted comfort zone for high-pressure studio work. Not least to step onto a franchise whose last director found the contents of this particular Marvel chalice rather less than nutritious (Alan Taylor described *Thor: The Dark World* as an experience "I hope never to repeat and don't wish upon anybody else").

"It's never been my plan to come and make big studio films," Waititi admits, pouring *Empire* a cuppa from a teapot swathed in a lairy woollen cosy. "I was very happy just making my kind of films, 'cause they're a lot easier and shorter. So this came as a surprise, and I was definitely unsure because I'd watched a lot of these films and enjoyed them, but really had no idea how they were made. On reflection, I realised what fun I could have with the tools and the toys and the cast they were suggesting. I think you can still make art within the studio system. You just have to kind of dress it up in a certain way. And sort of subvert it."

With the last *Thor* movie having been less critically well-received than the first, there is a strong sense of a need to change tack and do something that didn't ping-pong between Earth and Asgard. "Ultimately we're really happy with *The Dark World*," Winderbaum insists. "But it was exciting for us to try something new and just put Thor off in space in a very linear plot."

So here we join a Thor who, in the two Earth-years since *Age Of Ultron*, has been wandering the universe looking for clues about the Infinity Stones, unaware that his crafty, supposedly dead brother Loki (Tom Hiddleston) has usurped the throne of Asgard. Until, that is, he bounds





Thor updates his Facebook status. Possibly.

back home and falls afoul of an ancient, all-powerful Asgardian who's taken advantage of Odin's exile to get back in the Nine Realms-dominating game. Namely, Hela.

"Taika's really interested in the anarchy to her," Blanchett tells us at the end of her Hemsworth-throttling day. "I thought a lot about the birth of punk. There's a bit of that spirit in Hela." For research, she watched punk documentaries such as Julien Temple's *The Filth And The Fury*. "So many girls were given a voice in that punk universe," she says, "like Siouxsie Sioux, who came out and had all that energy." There is certainly a Siouxsie-ness, you'll notice, to Hela's heavy eye shadow and south-east London twang.

After losing the aforementioned Bifrost battle, Thor — along with the deposed Loki — is dumped on the psychedelic, wormhole-surrounded planet Sakaar, lorded over by

a blingy despot named The Grandmaster (Jeff Goldblum) who promptly enslaves him as a gladiator. "It's kind of a prison-break, kind of a castaway movie where Thor finds himself trapped on an alien world while Asgard is in turmoil," Winderbaum explains. With Mjolnir destroyed by Hela and a de-powering "obedience disc" attached, "He's gotta use his smarts and his charisma and his savvy to navigate his way off this world."

Hemsworth is relishing the opportunity to freshen up the Thor formula. "It's nice for the story and the character to be in a different space," he says. "We get to see a whole different range of colours here." He's pleased to be working with Blanchett ("If anyone's gonna kick your ass...") and has enjoyed squaring up against *Creed*'s Tessa Thompson as warrior goddess Valkyrie ("She's a badass, tough character who could probably beat the shit out of Thor if she wanted to"). But most of all, he appreciates the chance to do something new with a character he's already played four times.

Waititi's first priority was to make-over the "weird Norse rock alien" as he affectionately calls him — and we're not just talking about that Maximus-esque haircut. "He's definitely a new man now," the director says. "He's got more personality, more depth. Thor's been on Earth a long time, hanging out with Tony Stark, and he's picked up the vernacular."

Hemsworth describes this new Thor as "not feeling so otherworldly, with more of a contemporary personality and sense of humour. Anything that felt Shakespearean, Taika just said, 'Come on, we've done that. He doesn't talk like that anymore.' There's a lot of ad lib in this, which there was never really room for before. It's probably the most fun I've had on a Marvel film."

His fellow cast members are similarly impressed. "Taika's been so respectful to the mythology," says Tom Hiddleston, back in Loki green-and-gold. "But he's injected so much humour into it. He's given every character truly laugh-out-loud moments without betraying their integrity." Jeff Goldblum doesn't hold back. "I fell in love with him immediately. He's a loosey-goosey improvisational grandmaster





**Above:** Idris Elba as Asgardian warrior-god Heimdall. **Right:** Cate Blanchett's punk-style anarchist Hela.



Mark Ruffalo's Bruce Banner and Thor come to blows. Or rather, get to grips.

himself, so we hit it off. He's a wonderful and stylish and deeply handsome director. I think he's going to do something special with this."

**NOT THAT WAITITI'S** neglecting all the high-stakes spectacle we've come to expect of these Marvel movies. Far from it. Hemsworth promises "some of the most visually stunning action and stunt sequences in any of the films", from a production that's occupied all nine stages of Village Roadshow Studios – and all of its sprawling backlot, too.

*Ragnarok* will see Thor battling the demonic Surtur ("a Mafia kingpin-type old-school guy from the age of Odin" says Winderbaum) in the fiery realm of Muspelheim; there will be a sojourn on Earth where, as we saw in a *Doctor Strange* post-credits scene, Thor and Loki will enlist the Sorcerer Supreme to help track down the missing All-Father. And, of course, we'll be seeing more of the thunder god's glistening home.

As Dan Hennah gives *Empire* a tour around a vast, circular Asgardian plaza constructed on the backlot, he describes the production as "on the scale of one of the *Lord Of The Rings* films". Then, just as we're feeling like we're on familiar fantasy territory amid this Nordic-style, dragon-decorated architecture, Hennah takes us around a corner and into a different world entirely.

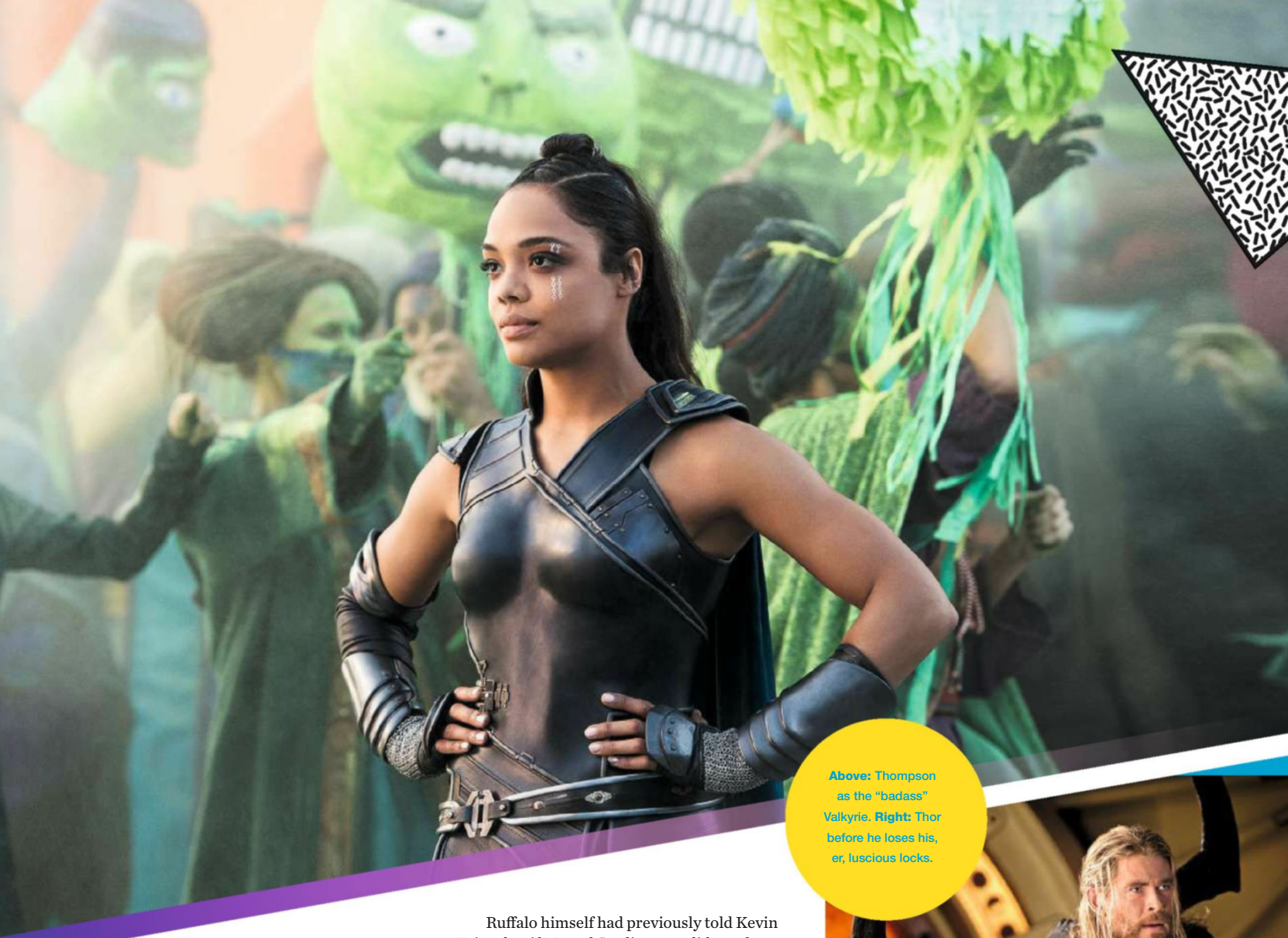
"This is Sakaar," he says proudly of the neighbouring set-build. We stroll in the shadow of weird structures that appear to have been randomly glommed together with geometrically diverse pressed-metal panels, all in a variety of bright, garish colours that exude a pulp, '60s sci-fi feel: mustard, aqua, orange, green. Waititi and Hennah were inspired above all by the vivid, unearthly creations of Marvel's star Silver Age artist Jack Kirby. "It's fun, it's colourful, it's crazy and it's seriously retro," says Hennah. "Everything on this planet has fallen out of a wormhole, so it's made out of debris. It's a bit like a Brazilian shanty town."

It's on Sakaar we're introduced to Thompson's Valkyrie, and where she's spent most of her time during the shoot. "It's just avant-garde and weird and beautiful," she says. "All the extras are decked out in a way that makes you feel like you're in a Björk music video."

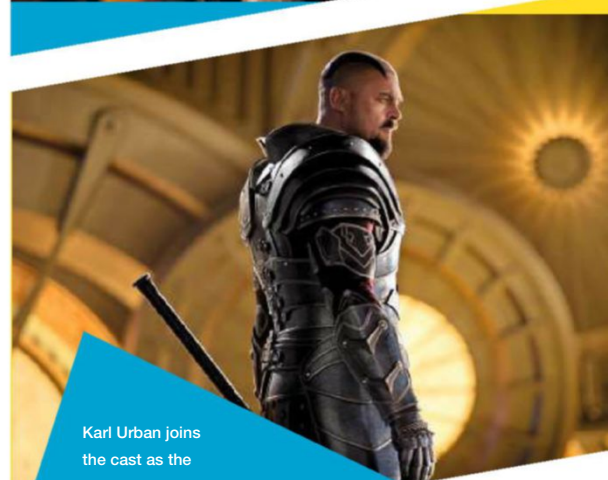
For Waititi, making this movie was essentially a question of: why hold back? "If you've got a name like *Ragnarok*, you've got to live up to it," he reasons. "I was a huge fan of *Flash Gordon* and this is as close to that as you can get. I've been able to put everything, including the kitchen sink, into this film. It's so eclectic, it's so weird, and so all over the place. You've got creatures made of stone, you've got insect aliens, you've got gladiators, you've got Jeff Goldblum..."

And there's one other thing he mentions, too. A very big thing. To paraphrase Tony Stark in 2012, he has a Hulk. "That really sealed the deal for me," says Waititi. "The idea of Thor and Hulk on an alien planet."





Above: Thompson as the "badass" Valkyrie. Right: Thor before he loses his, er, luscious locks.



Karl Urban joins the cast as the villainous Skurge.

**TO CHRIS HEMSWORTH**, they're Butch and Sundance. To Mark Ruffalo, they're De Niro and Grodin in *Midnight Run*. But for Taika Waititi, the pairing of Hulk and Thor in *Ragnarok* is mostly reminiscent of *Withnail And I*. Wait, what?

"Hulk is like this strapless horse, and self-destructive as well," explains Waititi. "He's internally very conflicted, an imbalanced character who can flip out at any moment, and the idea of Thor having to be with him reminded me of I trying to deal with Withnail."

Ruffalo cracks up when *Empire* mentions this. "Totally! I like that. That's even better than *Midnight Run*..." According to the fourth-time-out Bruce Banner, the idea of pairing Thor and his raging, green smashing machine was born while shooting *Age Of Ultron*, during which he and Hemsworth became the best of bros. "We had a great time. I love the guy so much. Chris was like, 'Let's find a movie to do together! We should do a buddy-cop movie or something!'" Later, when paired for interviews during that movie's publicity tour, they jointly fantasized about a film that would make an odd couple out of Banner and Odinson. "So when they decided to do *Thor 3* Chris was like, 'It should be me and Ruffalo.' That's kinda how it happened."

Ruffalo himself had previously told Kevin Feige that if Marvel Studios ever did another stand-alone *Hulk*, it should be based on the 2006 *Planet Hulk* storyline, in which Banner is banished from Earth and winds up as a gladiator on the planet Sakaar. But with Universal still owning the rights to the *Hulk* movie franchise, that story was instead folded into *Ragnarok*.

"When we find him, he's been Hulk for two years," explains Ruffalo. "And now he's the gladiator champion of Sakaar, so he's enjoying quite a bit of fame and adulation. He's also aware of being hated on Earth and feared by the Avengers, so he has no interest in going back. He's enjoying himself!" However, Hulk is the key to Thor's escape from the Grandmaster's domain, so he somehow has to tease the long-absent Dr Banner out from beneath all those layers of dominant id.

"Thor needs to achieve his goals, but he's also dealing with this character who's very volatile," says Waititi. "And that to me is what makes this story *really* interesting. How do you deal with a character who's complicating things and trying to make your mission harder?" Ruffalo compares Hulk to "a three-year-old child". But, as we've seen in the latest trailer, Hulk doesn't merely smash in this movie. Hulk *talks*. "Yeah, he speaks now. Even though it's somewhat rudimentary. And he can also exist without always being angry. He's reborn. And he likes it."



Despite all the visual effects and performance capture required to transform Ruffalo into the eight-foot-six Hulk, Waititi encouraged as much improvisation between him and Hemsworth as he did any other actor. "We've had such a fun connection," Hemsworth says. "We bring out something different in each other." For Ruffalo, the process threw out some "weird, exciting things. There was a lot of experimenting."

Not that VFX supervisor Jake Morrison minded. "It's really fun to be able to play with a Hulk that's not all 'Hulk smash'," he insists. "We have a Hulk that's a lot more complex, a lot more nuanced. You get to have moments of reflection. It's a much more studied Hulk."

And, if the buzz among the two actors' on-set colleagues is to be believed, the chemistry between them is intoxicating. "Sometimes when we're watching them, I swear it's like watching Walter Matthau and Jack Lemmon," Winderbaum says. "It's like they were born to share the screen. It's wild. I think you could easily base another movie on the partnership between these two maniacs."

IT'S MID-JULY 2017, nine months since *Ragnarok* wrapped and, under normal circumstances, Waititi could very well have made another movie by now. But when *Empire* catches up with him, he's still shooting the third *Thor*. "I'm in Atlanta. We're doing reshoots," he says chirpily down the phone. "In New Zealand we call them pick-ups but I'm trying to use the local lingo. It's going well."

Surprisingly, for a filmmaker who's used to working briskly and on a modest scale, he sounds neither exhausted nor exasperated by the fact he's back on a cavernous soundstage. He admits shooting certain big stunt sequences proved "laborious" and he doesn't deny he's had doubts; "I've got a big imagination. I could imagine things. Like having the film taken away and being fired. And then cast out of film society. That's how big my imagination could get." But he and Marvel are getting along like a realm on fire, it appears. "I feel really good about the film. Yeah. I think it's really good. It's fun and it's big. It's everything I was attracted to when they approached me to do it."

Waititi's producer is happy, too. Winderbaum feels he's getting exactly what he wanted from the director of *Boy* and *What We Do In The Shadows*. "This is definitely a Taika movie. If you look at his canon so far, this feels like it would fit right in with the rest of them." Ruffalo agrees, joyfully describing Planet Waititi as "a very light and bright and airy, quirky world" — not at all a *Dark* one. The spirit of Taika's *Thor*, he says, "is breaking down barriers and blowing expectations of these characters." He laughs. "People are either gonna kill us or fête us!"

*Ragnarok* may mean The End Of All Things. But with Taika Waititi at the helm, it feels much more like a whole new beginning. 🍷

THOR: RAGNAROK IS IN CINEMAS FROM 27 OCTOBER

# FASHION GOD OF THUNDER

Costume designer Mayes C. Rubeo gives the inside skinny on Thor's new look

## THE HAIR

Thor has long denied Asgardian barbers one hell of a payday by refusing to get his Fabio-esque blond locks cut. No such luck on planet Sakaar. "There were many meetings about it," says Rubeo of the radical redo. "But it works. Chris is a great-looking guy and would look good bald." Hemsworth, perhaps understandably, didn't put the hammer down on the decision. "He was happy he didn't have to wear the extensions."

## THE ARMS

"Chris is a great specimen," says Rubeo of the tree trunks that Hemsworth calls arms, fully on display after being largely encased in chainmail in *Thor: The Dark World*. "The man works out so much. Those are his arms. And we thought [showing them] would make him heavier-looking."

## THE DISCS

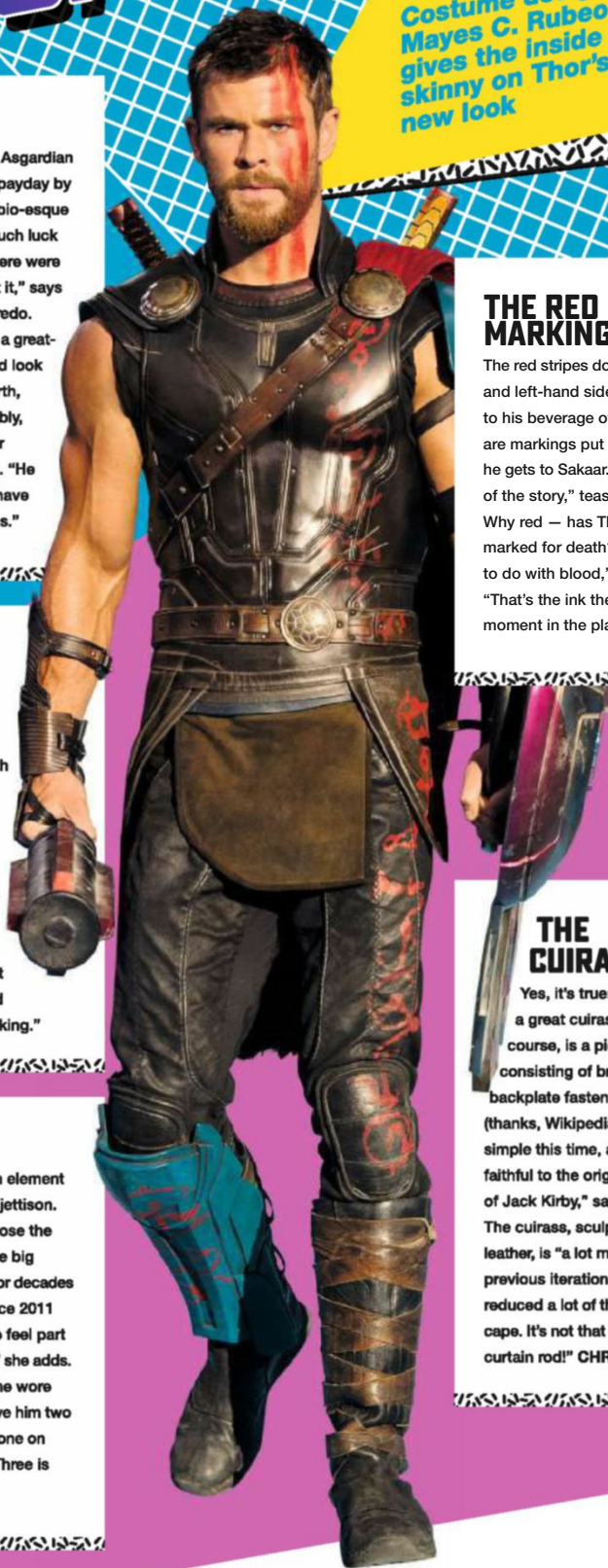
There was one design element Rubeo didn't want to jettison. "He's never going to lose the discs," she says of the big buttons he's sported for decades in the comics and since 2011 on the screen. "These feel part of his Asgardian look," she adds. "In the other movies he wore maybe six, but we gave him two to hold his cape, and one on the side of his belt." Three is the magic number.

## THE RED MARKINGS

The red stripes down Thor's face and left-hand side aren't a nod to his beverage of choice: these are markings put on him when he gets to Sakaar. "It's a big part of the story," teases Rubeo. Why red — has Thor been marked for death? "It's nothing to do with blood," she adds. "That's the ink they have at that moment in the place he gets it."

## THE CUIRASS

Yes, it's true: Thor's got a great cuirass. Which, of course, is a piece of armour consisting of breastplate and backplate fastened together (thanks, Wikipedia). "It is more simple this time, and more faithful to the original designs of Jack Kirby," says Rubeo. The cuirass, sculpted from real leather, is "a lot more agile" than previous iterations. "And we reduced a lot of the size of his cape. It's not that humongous curtain rod!" CHRIS HEWITT





THE EMPIRE INTERVIEW

# MAN OF STEEL

WHETHER CREATING A LOVEABLE CYBORG IN *TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY* OR PLANNING FOUR *AVATAR* SEQUELS, JAMES CAMERON HAS ALWAYS PURSUED THE IMPOSSIBLE. JAMES DYER JOINS HIM AT HIS LA BASE TO FIND THE DIRECTOR NUKING THE RULEBOOK ONCE MORE

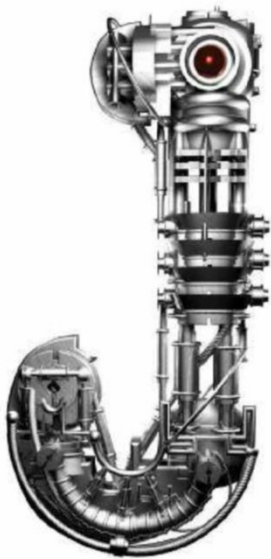
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James Cameron, photographed  
exclusively for *Empire* at  
Lightstorm, Los Angeles, on  
29 June 2017.





JAMES CAMERON IS THE MOST SUCCESSFUL director on Earth. This is not hyperbole. It's fact. He has transformed the industry with almost every film he's made. He remains the only person to have solo-dived almost 11km to the ocean's deepest point. His *Titanic* won 11 Oscars. And his most recent films occupy both first *and* second place in the list of most profitable movies of all time, with combined takings of nearly five billion dollars. He also has a small Venezuelan frog named after him.

Yet success has been hard-earned. Three of Cameron's films have also been the most expensive ever made, any one of which would have been a career-killer had it failed. Meanwhile, his punishing shoots have become legend — stories whispered to young grips around flickering campfires. Ed Harris was left sobbing on *The Abyss*, the *Titanic* crew tripped balls after their soup was spiked with PCP, and Cameron tore the entire Pinewood crew of *Aliens* — and one unfortunate tea lady — a new one after losing his shit at their regularly scheduled breaks. “You can’t scare me,” read the crew T-shirts on *The Abyss*, “I work for James Cameron.” But despite mutinies, naysayers and nightmare productions, Cameron has never faltered nor failed in his ambitions. While he hasn’t released a movie since 2009, he’s been quietly busy, looking both backwards, with the brand-new 3D remaster of his 1991 masterpiece *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, and forwards, beginning to shoot four other sequels: a quartet of mammothly scaled follow-ups to *Avatar*.

My first encounter with ‘Iron Jim’ occurred ten years ago in New Zealand, over a plate of cheesecake in the *Avatar* catering tent. Despite his ferocious reputation, the director was congenial and surprisingly soft-spoken. When I catch up with him in June 2017, it’s among assorted memorabilia from his films, carefully displayed in his own private museum space at Lightstorm in LA. On this occasion taking time away from an *Avatar 2* soundstage instead of dessert, he speaks carefully and precisely — this is a man who says neither “um” nor “ah” — as he ponders the highs and lows of his storied career.

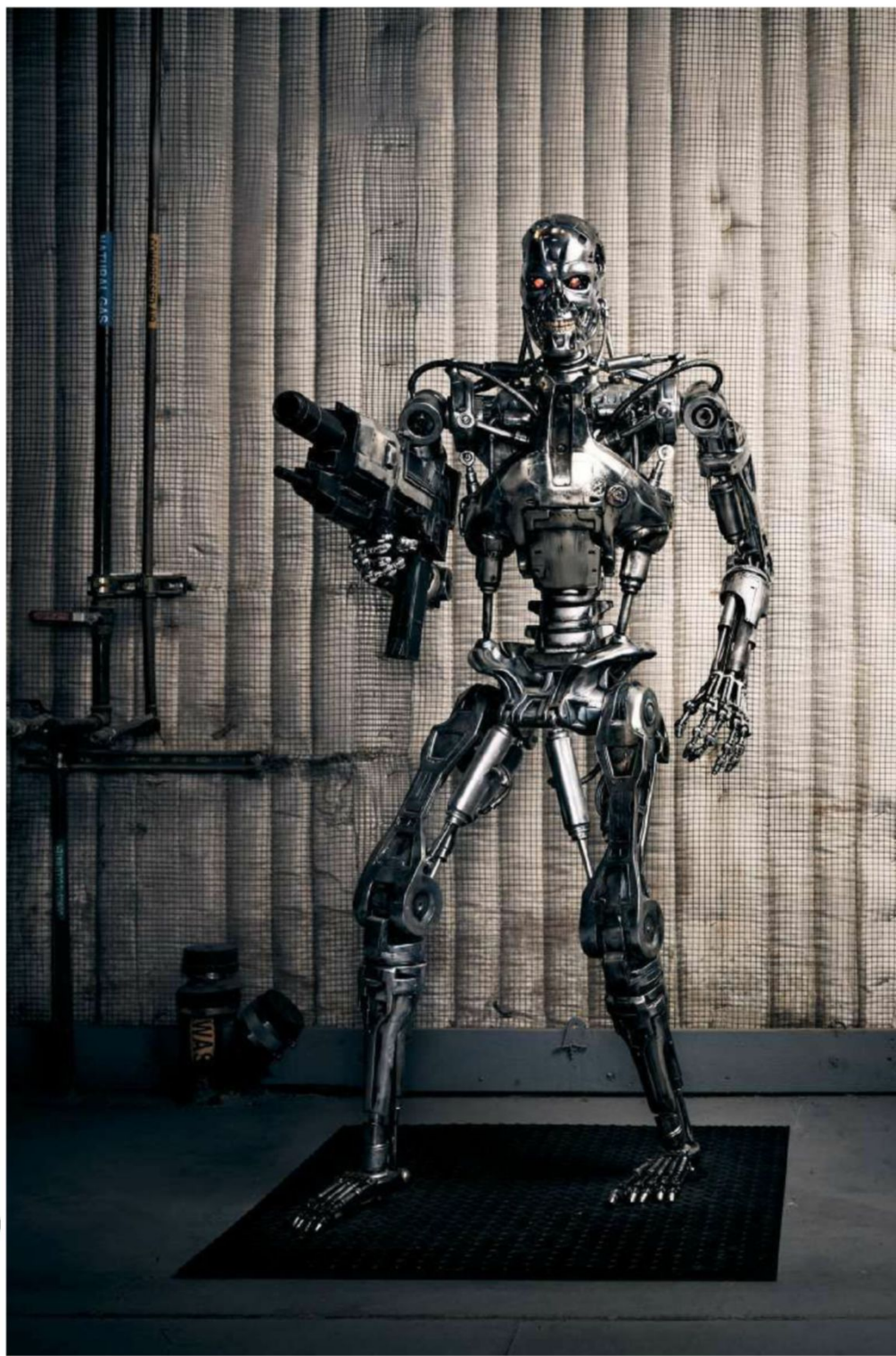
**You’re working on four *Avatar* follow-ups and are about to re-release *Terminator 2*. What is the key to a great sequel?**

I think the secret is to surprise in a familiar way. I think David Fincher went too far trying to surprise the audience by killing off everything you fought for [with *Alien 3*]. You have to surprise the audience in a way that they feel invigorated, and yet you have to be familiar enough that you’re still delivering on the promise of the things they love. I’m facing this through the *Avatar* films and even starting to look at *Terminator* again

and saying, “What can be said? What would be meaningful now?”

***Terminator 2* is a rare sequel that surpasses the original. Were you always confident it would be a hit?**

We were delivering in a couple of weeks, we screened the movie and people loved it but hated the ending. They just flat out fucking hated it. So I said, “Let’s cut it off.” Then I thought, “Alright, now what’s my ending?” I had them pull up this shot when [the heroes] are going to Cyberdyne. We hadn’t even rolled into the lights yet — we’re







just driving down the street to the location, essentially, and running the camera. From the split second they pulled the slate out to the moment where the camera tilted up to see Cyberdyne, I had whatever it was: nine seconds. So I thought, "Well, I better write something that fits in nine seconds." I came up with this bullshit thing about the future is now a dark highway at night and if a machine can learn the value of human life, maybe we can, too. Boom. I called Linda [Hamilton] up and had her record it, we dropped it in, did the fade-out and it was like, "Fuck me, that works." It's not like

**"THERE WAS NO CAREER FOR ME IF *TITANIC* WASN'T GREAT. IT WAS EITHER GREAT OR DIE."**

there's this great architecture behind everything in the movies. Sometimes, but not always.

**You've resisted the urge to fiddle with the film for this re-release, as some directors do. Though we did spot that the windshield on the T-1000's truck no longer regenerates between shots.**

The windshield always bothered me as a continuity thing. If I could have done it at the time, I would have.

**You were pretty judicious when you re-released *Titanic* as well: just a few tweaks, including a different constellation when Rose looks up at the night sky.**

We changed the constellation just to shut up [astrophysicist] Neil deGrasse Tyson banging on about how it was the wrong stars. We also changed a sunset [during the 'flying' scene on the bow]. We had a stage sky that had been painted the night before in extreme haste by the art department and it never quite matched the beautiful, natural sky that we had gotten. So I went in and tweaked the sky a little bit. The interesting thing about that scene is I probably never would have chosen the sky that nature gave us. It was kind of moody and glowering, with a little bit of red at the horizon. Fate just dealt us this really understated sunset, which ultimately fit the film better than my bourgeois artistic taste would have. Now that would be a greenscreen scene or we'd just shoot it and then replace the sky.

**Of all your movies, *The Abyss* is the only one that hasn't been a commercial hit.**

Yeah, it was quite modest. It wasn't even number one on its opening weekend. I think *Uncle Buck* beat it. But it eventually broke even, I'll give it that. It wasn't a money-loser, but it came pretty close.

**Does that bother you?**

Not really, because I know what it took to make that film and I'm proud of it. But I also consider it a flawed film in that it wasn't able to tightly integrate the emotional journey with the philosophical journey. It was two films beating against each other, especially in the back half. But I like to think that I wouldn't have done as well on *Titanic* if I hadn't made *The Abyss* and made those mistakes. It became forefront in my mind to integrate the emotional journey with the visual effects. I think that's why *Titanic* pulled together into a more integrated film, to the extent that people don't think of it as an effects film, even though it was.

**It's become fashionable for people to claim they don't like *Titanic*. Does the backlash irritate you?**

It became fashionable to say you didn't like *Star Wars* for a while. I think Freddie Mercury said in his bicycle song, "I didn't like *Star Wars*, but I just wanna ride my bicycle." Sold three million on that one. So yeah, sure. But it's a total





FRAGILE





CAUTION  
↑  
THIS SIDE UP

FRAGILE



revision. And it's mostly a revision coming from men, by the way.

**Because of the love story?**

Absolutely. I always say that the re-release of *Titanic* in 3D was so that men could cry and not be seen 'cause the glasses covered it up.

**Every film you make pushes the boundaries of moviemaking in some way. Where do you think that ambition comes from?**

Oh, probably lack of confidence in my basic ability to write, get actors to say lines, that sort of thing. It's like, "Alright, we need some razzle-dazzle here!" I think of the films that blew my mind when I was a teenager: *Mysterious Island*, *The 7th Voyage Of Sinbad*, *Jason And The Argonauts*. The skeleton fight in *Jason And The Argonauts* — that just lit my brain up like a pinball machine. Then a few years later it was *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and I think the next was *Star Wars*. It was these milestone pictures that excited me and made me want to be a filmmaker. I wanted to do that, which is quite hubristic if you think about it.

**You mentioned lack of confidence, but it seems like that just isn't part of your DNA. Are there ever points where your self-belief wavers?**

I suppose. I don't remember wringing my hands and equivocating a great deal. I always had such a clear sense of mission. I think there are many kicks in the teeth along the way on every project, and you don't get through without faith in yourself. Ray Bradbury said that every artist has an ego, but it's the sublime ego, which says, "I've got something to say, motherfuckers. Listen up!" Which is what every artist is saying, no matter how humble they appear to be. The second you put a painting up on a wall, you're saying, "Hey, look at this. Look at this thing I thought up." Obviously there are out-of-control egos. I think there are also in-control egos and, like Arnold Schwarzenegger, I believe I have an in-control ego. His quote to me on *Terminator 2* was, "My ego is so under control, it impresses even me."

**At what point would you say you were you at your lowest ebb, professionally?**

I think probably the post-production on *Titanic*. I literally had a razor blade taped to the monitor of my Avid with a little note that said, "Use in case film sucks." Because I'd painted myself into the biggest corner, I think, in moviemaking history. There was no career for me if that movie wasn't great. It was either great or die. Because it had the biggest price tag in history. It had all these negative production stories, most of which were completely fabricated. It wasn't about us being colossally stupid, other than underestimating what it took to light a 700-foot-long set that was 60 feet in the air — essentially five apartment blocks in a row. The tallest lights in Hollywood wouldn't reach over the deck! How we didn't see that one coming, I'm not quite

clear. But it's not like we were idiots. We just went over-budget and over-schedule by a lot on something that nobody saw the commercial value in. Then we screened it for the first time — I think it was May-ish of '97 — and the audience went berserk. I thought, "Could this actually work? Is that even remotely possible?" We got the highest cards anyone had ever heard of. Somewhere in there, hope started to rise again. [Paramount CEO] Sherry Lansing came over to my editing room and watched the film and everything changed at that point. It was like, "We're still gonna lose our ass, but at least we're

not gonna look stupid, 'cause we made a good movie." And then it started to build momentum.

**Avatar had its doubters, too, of course. But it was a gigantic hit and you're now surging ahead with sequels. How's that going?**

We started production two years ago — three years ago, if you count the earliest phase of design. I'm currently on stage all day shooting. I start with the principal actors at the end of September, then I go into a period of refining the cameras, and then I start live action in 19 months. But the live action is a relatively small part of the overall pie.







**You're shooting four films back-to-back, the first time that's ever been done. Surely even Peter Jackson must be looking at you as if you're insane.**

Yeah. He's a friend. I said, "It's your fault I'm doing this, motherfucker!" It's one big story. But I would say a little bit different from *The Lord Of The Rings*, which you knew was a trilogy and that allowed you to accept a sort of truncated ending for movies one and two and then a fulfilment. This is a greater narrative broken up into four complete stories. The interesting conceit of the *Avatar* sequels is it's pretty much the

**"OBVIOUSLY THERE ARE OUT OF CONTROL EGOS. I BELIEVE I HAVE AN IN CONTROL EGO."**

same characters. There are new characters and a lot of new settings and creatures, so I'm taking characters you know and putting them in unfamiliar places and moving them on this greater journey. But it's not a whole bunch of new characters every time. There's not a new villain every time, which is interesting. Same guy. Same motherfucker through all four movies. He is so good and he just gets better. I know Stephen Lang is gonna knock this out of the park.

**Does it make you at all nervous that *Avatar 2* won't hit cinemas until 2020, 11 years after the original?**

It doesn't bother me at all, because this fits my overall game plan. I've got a nice synchronicity between my private, philanthropic, environmental passion and where I'm investing. I invest in things that I think are going to help us as a species, which is mostly around sustainable, organic agriculture. *Avatar* fits into that in the sense that these are films where I can presumably do well by doing good. I think the films have some positive benefits aside from just pure entertainment and good, clean fun in a movie theatre. To me it all adds up to the right answer to what to do with the stub end of my existence.

**You're now an outspoken environmentalist and a vegan. Have you softened as a filmmaker? Has 'Iron Jim' retired?**

You don't get soft in the head as a vegan. If anything, you get more militant! I would say that the thing that changed my posture and my demeanour on set more than anything was the expedition films: the documentaries. I took an eight-year hiatus after *Titanic* and wound up getting really interested in deep-ocean exploration. I learned that when you go into a project with a small, handpicked group — and it must always be a small, handpicked group on a ship, because there just aren't enough bunks — then if you're yelling at anybody, you should be yelling at yourself for making a bad choice. For the first 20 years of my career, I thought, "If I yell at somebody now, they will be less likely to make that mistake again." Or the other people around will be less likely to make that mistake. Now I know that it's pointless to try to improve the process after the fact. Once somebody has shown up and the stuff is wrong, they didn't fail — I failed. Because I failed to oversee their work. And once you have that epiphany, it's pointless to throw a tantrum. Unless you just need a tantrum. I think I'm due one on every film. Just one, for old times' sake. Right?

**So it's safe for the Pinewood tea lady to come out of hiding?**

Bless her soul. It wasn't her fault, but she did take an arrow for the team. ●

**TERMINATOR 2: JUDGMENT DAY 3D IS IN CINEMAS FROM 29 AUGUST**



# STRANGER THING

**IT'S MODESTLY BUDGETED AND  
BASED ON A 30-YEAR-OLD BOOK,  
YET CREEPY-CLOWN HORROR *IT*  
HAS MANAGED TO SCARE UP THE  
BIGGEST BUZZ OF 2017**

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WORDS **TOM ELLEN**







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FOR ANDRÉS MUSCHIETTI, 29 March 2017 was a very odd day.

The Argentine director of *It* was thigh-deep in cold Canadian mud, orchestrating the fly-by of a camera-drone in the sky above. The vista captured by the drone was to be the final shot required for Muschietti's adaptation of Stephen King's legendary 1986 novel — in which a deranged supernatural clown named Pennywise torments the children of a small town — before the filmmaker headed to the comparative luxury of an LA

edit suite. Then his phone lit up. His sister Barbara (who also happens to be his producer) was calling. Again and again.

"It was a little crazy," Muschietti laughs. "At first it was, 'We just hit three million views in 15 minutes.' But then it just kept going and going and going..."

The "it" in question is the staggering reaction that greeted *It*'s debut trailer on its release on 29 March. Clocking in at two minutes and 33 seconds, and offering the world its first proper glimpse of Bill Skarsgård as Pennywise, the teaser managed to notch up 197 million views in 24 hours, comfortably shattering the record for the most watched trailer in a single day. Its closest competitor — *Fast & Furious 8* — fell nearly 60 million clicks short.

"There's no other horror movie in that top ten," says Muschietti, still seeming a touch incredulous as he takes a break from supervising the film's post-production in that LA edit suite. "I mean, the whole list is almost exclusively big blockbusters..." He opens his mouth to try and explain it, but finds he can't.

So just what is it about *It*? The nostalgia factor only explains so much; after all, it powers an engine or two on the *Star Wars* franchise, and *The Force Awakens*' trailer sits a lowly sixth on Muschietti's aforementioned chart. And while creepy clowns are in vogue, thanks to last year's rash of still-unexplained sightings, from Canada to New Zealand, surely even they can only whip up so much internet traffic?

Producer Seth Grahame-Smith — who's been on the project since before Muschietti signed up — has a theory that might just hold water. "We're different from other horror movies," he says. "We're much bigger in scope and wider in tone. We are not a \$100 million movie [the budget for *It* has not been made public, but has been reported as being in the region of \$30 million] but in terms of sets and stunts and visual effects, what we're doing is extremely ambitious. There are moments that feel like *Stand By Me*, there are moments that feel like *The Goonies*, and then there are moments that lead to huge, huge scares. The

closest I can get to describing it is a 'coming-of-age horror'."

Put simply: if the trailer showed that scary movies can still spark mass hysteria, the film itself is out to prove they can also be epic in scale.

**IT'S AUGUST 2016**, eight months before Pennywise breaks the internet, when *Empire* arrives on set at Toronto's Pinewood Studios. Rather than the usual lanyard, we are presented with a pair of sturdy rubber boots and a small yet powerful flashlight. "Good luck," grins

Muschietti, as we step warily past him onto the soundstage. "Hope you don't die."

We are heading, it seems, into the bowels of Derry, Maine; the dank, sprawling sewer network that serves as Pennywise's chief stomping ground, and the setting for many of the novel's most important — and horrific — scenes. Following a labyrinth of dark, echoey pipes through ten inches of stagnant water, we finally emerge into a vast chamber, Pennywise's lair, the centrepiece of which is a towering totem pole of dead kids' belongings: rocking horses, Go-Karts and bloodied gym shoes stretching up as far as the eye can see.







Concept art for the 2017 film version of *It* and (left) Bill Skarsgård as the on-screen version.



Sprawling and immaculately constructed, this is not your average horror-movie tableau.

But the three huge soundstages that *It* occupies here at Pinewood are just a drop in the sewer. For the creation of above-ground Derry, the film took over the entire town of Port Hope, Ontario, transforming its streets, shops and municipal buildings. Since its timeline spans from 1988 to '89, the town's movie-theatre marquee advertises *Batman* and *Lethal Weapon 2*. And then there's the gigantic Paul Bunyan statue which was erected in the park (an Easter egg for fans of the book, who will gleefully remember the *part* that plays in proceedings).

If the world-building is impressive, the stuntwork is similarly colossal, as Pennywise unleashes a carnival of horrors in a bid to feed on his young victims' fear. "There's more CGI than mechanical effects," admits Grahame-Smith, "but we're doing a lot of practical stuff. The scene where blood shoots out of the sink — we did that practically and it was... grotesque. I'm talking *The Shining* elevator level. The poor stuntwoman got destroyed."

That set-piece will sound familiar to anyone who's seen the 1990 *It* mini-series. However, both cast and crew are anxious to distance their version from that much-loved/feared small-

screen outing, which saw Tim Curry traumatise a generation with his rambunctious, Noo Yoik-accented Pennywise. "We don't call this a 'remake' or a 'reboot' or a 'continuation'," notes Grahame-Smith. "This is just the first-ever movie of *It*. So there'll be no cameos or references to the series. I mean, I *did* want there to be a restaurant in Derry called Tim's Curry, but that got shot down pretty quick..."

In terms of plot, King's original story is still very much in place. A gang of misfits known as the 'Losers' Club' unite first in childhood, and then again as adults, to battle an ancient, shape-shifting evil ('It') that's menacing their small hometown. The only significant alteration is the structure; while King's book toggles between the 1950s and '80s, Muschietti's tale will be split into two separate films, the first focusing on the pre-teen Losers in the late '80s, the second (box office allowing) on their grown-up counterparts in 2016. It's a prodigious and ambitious plan: while planning a two-parter with the Avengers is one thing, planning one with relatively unknown actors and only a sewer-dwelling clown as the throughline is quite another.

"The concept of two movies was already on the table when I signed up," says Muschietti. "I didn't have a problem with that — I liked it, actually. We have a big cast, and so much backstory. It's difficult to get all that into two hours."

Originally, of course, the question of how to distil King's 1,300-odd pages for the big screen wasn't Muschietti's to ponder. In 2012, Warner Bros. brought in *True Detective* creator Cary Fukunaga to helm the adaptation, only for the director to depart in 2015, citing the old chestnut of 'creative differences'. ("I know you hear that a lot," laughs Grahame-Smith, "but it truly was the case here...") Andrés Muschietti was drafted in instead, the producers having been impressed by his 2013 breakout, *Mama*, >



in which a furious maternal ghost at one point unleashes a shower of moths.

Fukuanga has spoken unhappily of the split, telling *Variety*, “What I was trying to do was an elevated horror film with actual characters... They wanted archetypes and scares.” Muschietti, however, has a different take.

“Cary’s script didn’t have much interest in Pennywise being a shape-shifter,” he tells *Empire*. “It was leaning towards an almost hyper-realistic story, and I felt that something of [King’s] original work wasn’t there.” Which is not to say Muschietti stuck religiously to King’s source material. “We made sure to maintain the emotional tentpoles [of the novel],” he says. “But the book portrays the fears of kids growing up in the ’50s, and I felt we had an opportunity to update it. When Stephen King was growing up, kids were afraid of what they saw in the movies, so ‘It’ becomes a werewolf, a mummy, a creature from the Black Lagoon. But my instinct was that these things aren’t scary anymore. I started exploring fears that were more layered, more profound, more personal to each member of the Losers’ Club.”

Happily, while the old horror stalwarts may have lost their spine-chilling sheen, clowns appear to be agelessly unsettling. “They never used to freak me out,” says 14-year-old Jaeden Lieberher, who plays stuttering Losers’ Club leader Bill Denbrough. “But after working on this movie...” He shakes his head slowly, leaving fellow Loser Jeremy Ray Taylor to put it less ambiguously: “When I first saw [Skarsgård] in costume, I wanted to run away screaming.”

**WHICH TAKES US** to the real star of the show, and the favored incarnation of Derry’s monster: Pennywise the Dancing Clown. His appearances in the book tend to act as starting pistols for the most memorable sections, and, as Grahame-Smith rightly points out, “What do people remember about the TV series? Just Tim Curry’s performance.” Despite the crew’s staunch anti-reboot rhetoric, Muschietti admits there was serious pressure involved in following up Curry’s bombastic depiction of the killer clown. “It was a cult moment in horror,” he concedes. “He scared the shit out of a generation.”

The director’s method of combating this pressure was to develop an entirely new take on Pennywise. Rather than Curry’s jowly, bellowing, middle-aged psychopath, he wanted a quietly sinister “baby-faced” clown. Muschietti met with several young actors before casting 26-year-old Skarsgård. “I had a great meeting with Will Poulter,” the director recalls, “but [in the end] I felt he wasn’t fully immersed in the idea of playing Pennywise. He would have been great; he’s very talented and he also has... *that face*.” He pulls a nightmarish grin — all eyebrows and teeth — then breaks off, laughing. “But there are a dozen actors that could have played Pennywise. There are the obvious choices — someone like Willem Dafoe — but then I found Bill. Bill is... amazing.”

On set in Toronto, Skarsgård’s mad method is in full effect. Having finally been released from



**Surprise!** Eddie Kaspbrak (Jack Grazer) gets the fright of his life.

**Right:** Director Andy Muschietti on set with Jaeden Lieberher, who plays Bill Denbrough. **Far right:** House of horror: Beverly Marsh (Sophia Lillis), Richie Tozier (Finn Wolfhard), Eddie Kaspbrak (Jack Grazer) and Bill.

the sewers, *Empire* is de-booted and shepherded towards an unremarkable patch of grassland, where the ghostly white figure of Pennywise gradually becomes visible through the tall reeds. He sits there, half-hidden like some horrible exotic bird, muttering insanely while chewing a child’s severed arm like a chicken drumstick. With his powdered face, Regency-style wig and frilly frock coat, he looks like a nightmarish version of Prince George from *Blackadder III*.

We have questions. But unfortunately they have to wait; we’re told we won’t be speaking to Skarsgård today, as he is having “toddler blood” sponged from his chin. It is, frankly, the greatest excuse for not speaking to *Empire* we’ve ever heard. And we’re not about to start arguing.

Almost a year later, the 26-year-old is finally ready to talk. It turns out that the new Pennywise still has fear on the mind. “In order for this movie to be as effective as the book and the series, I have to scare a *whole generation*,” Skarsgård says. “So yes, there were fears about taking the role. There were ghosts going around

my brain. But I had to trust myself, and trust Andy [Muschietti] to get the character right.”

His clown is wild and unpredictable. “My take was that Pennywise functions very simply. Nothing much is going on in terms of what he’s thinking — he’s animalistic and instinctive.” Besides his upsettingly wet lips, his main source of panic-generation is his supremely unsettling voice. “I would go from super-high-pitched to super-low-pitched,” Skarsgård says. “It sounded ridiculous at times. I think we ended up somewhere in the middle. But it was very intense. It always is when you’re playing a character so different from yourself. I really didn’t want to speak to anyone during the shoots.”

All but out-Jared-Letoing Jared Leto, the actor skulked around *It*’s sets in grease-paint for weeks on end. His level of intensity is verified by 13-year-old co-star Jack Dylan Grazer, who plays asthmatic Losers’ Club member Eddie Kaspbrak, and recalls Skarsgård “walking around the room, freaking out, making crazy sounds” between takes. Skarsgård chuckles as he remembers it:





Losers' Club members Beverly, Stanley Uris (Wyatt Oleff), Bill, Ben Hascomb (Jeremy Ray Taylor) and Eddie face their fears.



"The laughs and screams were just a way for me to maintain the maniacal essence of the character. I remember one of the kid extras found it very overwhelming. He started crying as soon as they said, 'Cut.' I had to be, like, 'It's okay, I'm Bill, this is just make-up!'"

**THIS STORY MIGHT** not bode well for that particular child's sleep patterns, but it's a strong indication that the makers of *It* have hit the mark. As is the fevered reaction to the trailer. And for Muschietti, the cherry on the creepy sundae is the feedback he's had from the man behind the original tale, Stephen King, who's having a banner 2017, what with this, *The Dark Tower*, and new TV shows *The Mist* and *Castle Rock*.

"He sent me an email saying he was really happy," the director says with a grin. "I thanked him for indulging all the liberties I'd taken creatively, and he actually praised one creature in particular that came from my own childhood fears, rather than the book. So that was great."

*It* is a novelty: an R-rated, blood-soaked horror with cussing kid heroes and blockbuster production values. For the same reasons, it's also a box-office risk. Until he knows whether it's paid off, Muschietti is remaining tight-lipped on the subject of the second film, which would focus on the adult Losers returning to Derry for another crack at Pennywise. However, he does reveal a storyline is currently being thrashed out, and that, "Everyone wants to make it as soon as possible because we're so in love with the first one."

Well, maybe not *everyone*. As much as he relished the role, Skarsgård has mixed feelings about donning the ginger fright wig once again. "It's funny," he says, "I went back to Stockholm after we wrapped, and every night for two weeks, I had these strange recurring Pennywise dreams. I was him, but I was in the wrong setting, somehow. I was upset that people could see my face. It was surreal. I can't explain it."

We can: clowns are absolutely terrifying. 🦇

**IT IS IN CINEMAS FROM 8 SEPTEMBER**

## FEARS OF A CLOWN



**REAL-LIFE JAPESTER CHEEKO REVEALS WHAT IT'S LIKE TO DON THE FACEPAINT**

**How did you get into clowning?**

I started 40 years ago in Glasgow as a magician. I wasn't initially interested in performing as a clown until I learned I could earn more! I introduced the make-up and some plate-spinning and balloon modelling and it took off from there. It's great fun. I can't believe I get paid to do it. I've got six grandkids and they love when I work a big gala day or something. They're chuffed to bits that grandpa's on the stage.

**Is the 'scary clown' thing bad for business?**

Ay, that killer-clown craze a few months ago made my business fall away something terrible. I was getting nuisance phone calls and threats. But it's actually nothing new. Twenty years ago I stopped on the way to a gig, in full kit, to ask some kids for directions, and they just ran away and I ended up surrounded by police! When they found out I was just doing a party it was fine though.

**Are you nervous about *It*?**

I knew a year ago that it was coming, so I started planning. I've had to change everything. I've stopped wearing the make-up, and it's not 'Cheeko The Clown' anymore, it's just 'Cheeko The Family Entertainer.' I had to get the caricature on my website redesigned.

**Is there a movie clown you like?**

The film I really like is *Shakes The Clown*. It's a spoof. Whoever did it [Bobcat Goldthwait] knows all about clowns. They all hang around in a bar called The Twisted Balloon, and they sit there drinking in full make-up. It's hilarious.

**OWEN WILLIAMS**

**CHEEKO — AKA TOMMY TEMPLETON — IS THE CURRENT PRESIDENT OF THE PAISLEY MAGIC CIRCLE**



# B E T T I N G T H E F A R M

IN HIS OWN WORDS,  
FIRST-TIME DIRECTOR  
FRANCIS LEE REFLECTS  
ON THE RURAL LIFE  
THAT INSPIRED  
*GOD'S OWN COUNTRY*,  
THE GAY LOVE STORY  
TAKING THE WORLD'S  
FESTIVALS BY STORM

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PORTRAITS CHRIS LEAH





Francis Lee, photographed  
exclusively for *Empire* near  
Haworth, North Yorkshire,  
on 26 June 2017.





# YORKSHIRE HAS ALWAYS BEEN HOME TO ME.

Its landscape formed me both emotionally and physically, and even though I 'escaped' to London when I was 20 to train as an actor, it's a place I've never been able to get out from underneath my flesh.

When I decided to quit acting and start making films about five years ago, it felt like the most rich and emotive territory to set my work — the most natural place on Earth to make my first feature film.

I had wanted to leave London for some time. The 'urban' lifestyle had depleted my resources massively and *God's Own Country* was an opportunity to move back to the Pennine Hills. My dad is still a sheep farmer there, his farm is not dissimilar to the one depicted in the film, and the thought of being back, close to my family and living on the remote hills of West Yorkshire, really excited me. I found an incredible, wooden 'hut' without WiFi or mobile reception, packed up from London and set off to make the film.

*God's Own Country* is the story of Johnny, an isolated young sheep farmer trying to keep his family farm going after his father has suffered a stroke. All his mates have moved away to college or got jobs in towns, and to cope with his isolation he gets plastered every night in the deserted local pub. He's shut himself down emotionally in order to cope. But that starts to change when he begins a relationship with Gheorghe, a Romanian migrant farm worker his father hires to help with the lambing in spring. This didn't happen to me — *God's Own Country* isn't autobiographical — but my experiences did inform the story and characters.

When I gave up acting to pursue filmmaking, I knew film school wasn't an option — it was prohibitively expensive and felt restrictive — so I decided to make a couple of short films as my 'training'. I got a job in a scrap-yard and started writing. I made three short films in a row, each set in Yorkshire, exploring the relationship between people and landscape. They did pretty

well on the short-film festival circuit and it gave me the confidence to sit down and write the full-length screenplay of *God's Own Country*. From beginning the process to wrapping the film took about four years.

It took about four days, though, to actually write the script, with a week or two to refine it so it was readable and not embarrassing. I have a brilliant friend who offered to read it, so tentatively I attached it to an email and pressed 'send'. Luckily he loved it and was super-supportive. Then, unbeknownst to me, he sent it to a friend of his, who happens to be one of the top London writer and director agents. Very quickly I got a call from her telling me how much she loved my writing, and we agreed to work together. Over the course of the next year she sent it out to people, and I met with many of them. The meetings all went something like this:

**Producer:** I love this script. It's amazing.

**Me:** Great.

**Producer:** What else are you working on?

**Me:** But I want to make this...



No-one wanted to do it due to its small-budget level; also, they couldn't see it reaching a wide audience. They saw it as a calling-card script and wanted me to write something else instead. But I wasn't ready to give up.

I was working away at this scrap-yard, unable to get a producer, when I heard about iFeatures. It's a scheme run by the BFI, Creative England, BBC Films and Creative Skillset — they start with 16 micro-budget film projects, which are whittled down to three. But to enter you need a producer. I got onto a programme run by Screen Yorkshire, an organised networking event. I met a lot of potential producers, and again everyone said they loved the idea, but hardly anyone wanted to commit. In the end, only two people were willing to do it, so they became the producers. That meant we could apply to iFeatures and luckily we were accepted.

From that point to the final decision, the process took about 11 months. I had great feedback all the way through, and got down to the last five — I felt the odds were good, but ultimately we didn't get selected. Instead





Gheorghe (Alec Secareanu) and Johnny (Josh O'Connor). Above, top to bottom: Secareanu, O'Connor and Lee on location; Johnny struggles with his feelings; Gheorghe and Johnny at work on the farm.



*Lady Macbeth*, *The Levelling* and *Apostasy* won the funding. I was happy for all these projects, but naturally I was very disappointed. But soon after the BFI called offering a lifeline: they committed to funding *God's Own Country* themselves.

So I was ready to start. Except for one thing — I had to wait a year for lambing season to start...

**— IN OCTOBER 2015** I started working on the film full time, knowing I was going to shoot the following April. The first character to cast was the lead, Johnny. He's in every scene and has an incredible emotional arc. I knew this was going to be a tough role for any actor to play. It required someone not only incredibly talented but willing to make themselves totally vulnerable on screen. I worked with the brilliant casting directors Shaheen Baig and Layla Merrick-Wolf, who drew up a list of young, interesting actors.

Josh O'Connor, who got the role, was on this list but was working in Corfu on the ITV series

*The Durrells* when we were casting. I sent him a couple of scenes so he could record himself and send me a self-tape. I didn't know him or his work at all, but when I first saw the scenes he'd recorded I was really excited by him because he delivered such a convincing, emotionally repressed depiction of the character. I thought, "Well, he's from the North somewhere," as his accent was so good. When I met him in London a couple of weeks later, I was shocked to find the most polite, gracious, funny, sweet boy from Cheltenham Spa. When I started to work with him on a scene in the meeting, I quickly realised he has a rare gift — the ability to totally transform himself into the character he's playing. This totally excited me, and I knew pretty quickly we could build this complex and

difficult character together.

For Alec Secareanu, who got the role of Gheorghe, it's a big deal because there aren't a lot of opportunities in Romania for actors. And certainly not playing one of the leads in an English-language film. I really got that sense when I went to Bucharest to cast the role — all the boys were very committed, and very hungry for it. From the 40 initial self-tapes I was sent, Alec was always my favourite. From the first moment, I saw someone who was very focused, with this great emotional intensity. But this film was going to live or die by the central relationship between the two boys, so it wasn't until I did the chemistry tests with him and Josh in London, to see how well they worked together, that I could make a final decision.



After I'd worked with them both for a couple of hours, I sent them off for a coffee and hid around the corner to see how they interacted when I wasn't in the room. Brilliantly, they looked very comfortable with each other. And thank God, because I got my two favourite actors.

— WITH THE TWO lads cast, I could start to investigate the characters and the world with them. For three months I worked with Josh and Alec: from the moment they were born until the moment we meet them in the film, we learnt everything about Johnny and Gheorghe, right down to whether they have sugar in their tea. Or do they prefer white or brown bread? By the time we came to shoot, the boys knew everything.

Part of the preparation was putting the lads to 'work', too. I hate that feeling of being pulled out of a story when I know something doesn't feel right, so I knew I didn't want any stunt or hand doubles and no 'fakery' whatsoever. Josh and Alec were going to have to learn everything they would have to do until it became second nature. They went to work on farms for two weeks, working eight-hour shifts. When you see Gheorghe delivering a lamb live in the film, that is Alec. When you see Johnny internally examining a cow, that is Josh. As well as understanding the practicalities of farming life, I wanted them to get the cold and wet and tiredness into their bones.

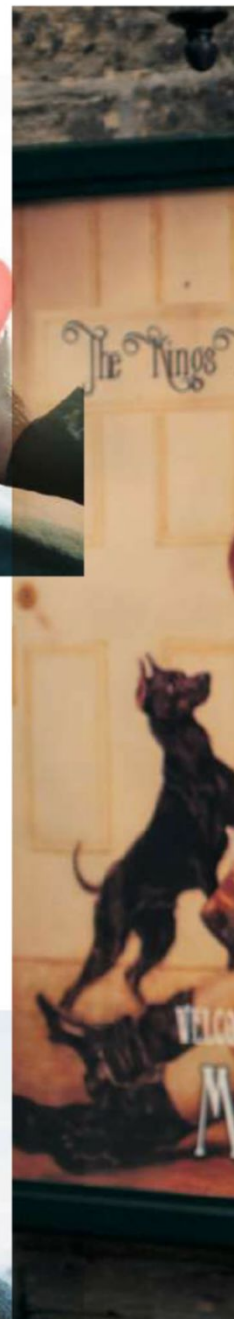
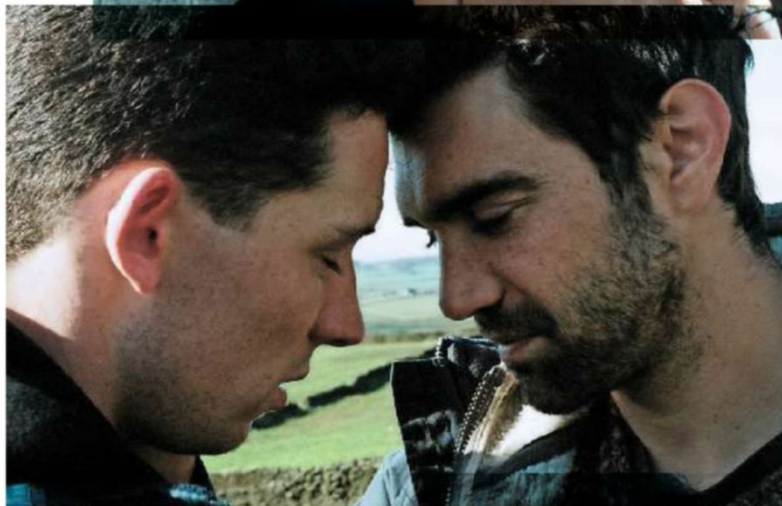
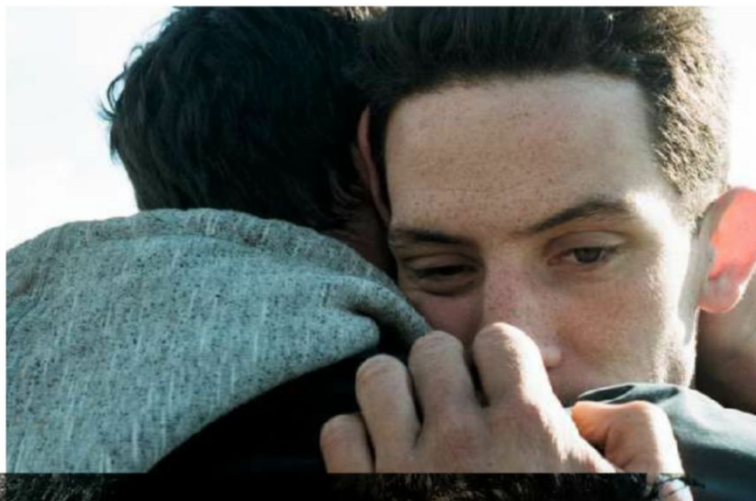
I kept them apart during this time — they worked on different farms — because I shot the film chronologically and didn't want them to know each other too well until they first met on screen as characters. I felt this would add another layer of nervousness in the performances. I did feel a bit bad because Alec had to live on his own in a hotel in town, and he was away from home and lonely. But the director in me thought it was ideal, as this totally translated to how his character feels.

I'd already made two short films at my dad's farm, so didn't think I could put him through that again. One of his friends said we could shoot on his instead, which was perfect. The shelter they spend time in is up on the moors above it. But there was no access to it, so everything had to be carried up the hill by hand. An hour carrying everything up. An hour carrying everything down. We shot in Keighley train station, which is about ten minutes' drive away. And the pub is by the Brontë parsonage in

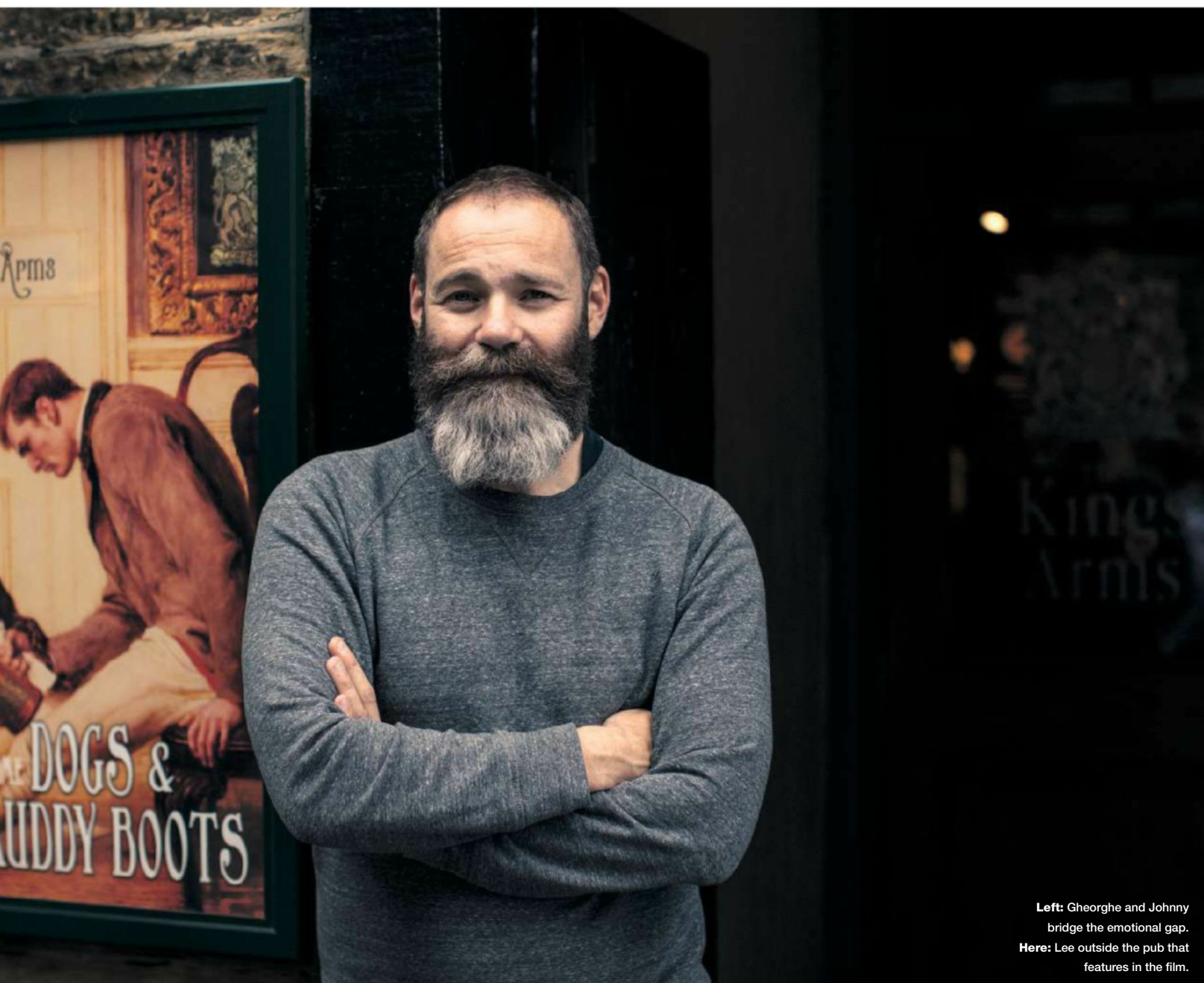
Haworth, which again is about ten minutes away. I had a fight with my producers over the pub, as it wasn't the closest to the unit base. But I wanted it for two reasons. Firstly, it had these incredible windows. Secondly, I loved the idea because one of my favourite films is *Rita, Sue And Bob Too*, and they come to the parsonage on the school trip. The pub is just by where Sue has the fight. I love the sound of their stilettos click-clacking down the cobbles of Haworth main street...

— ONE OF THE KEY roles in any crew is the director of photography. I had seen a film called *Songs My Brother Taught Me* at the London Film Festival and totally fallen in love with it, particularly how it looked. I got in

touch with the DP, Joshua James Richards, and sent him my script. We hit it off instantly and he totally understood what I was trying to achieve. Joshua is an artist in his own right. He's not just a 'camera person' who would simply do what I asked, but someone who intrinsically understands characters and storytelling. We worked together for about four months before the shoot, sharing photographs, paintings and other films to build the palette for *God's Own Country*. To add to the truthful depiction of the world, we knew we didn't want to use artificial lighting and it was a challenge to find the available lighting choices. I also knew the camera would always be very up close and personal to the actors, therefore the DP had to be someone who would be able to build







**Left:** Gheorghe and Johnny bridge the emotional gap.  
**Here:** Lee outside the pub that features in the film.

a trusting bond with them. Joshua is a beautiful man and created an incredible relationship with all the actors.

Even though we did all the preparation beforehand, the shoot wasn't without its challenges. Yorkshire in spring is unpredictable: you can have four seasons in one day. The continuity of this was extremely difficult and trying to navigate between snow one minute and bright sunshine the next was a nightmare. Shooting would have to stop as we waited for the snow to melt. As the rest of the crew had a brew, I'd be secretly running around trying to melt the snow by stamping on it.

But that wasn't the worst thing that happened. About halfway through we were shooting an interior in the bedroom. Gheorghe has left at this point, so we're shooting just with Josh. After a couple of set-ups he told me he didn't feel that well. After a couple more takes he started projectile-vomiting. We had to stop and I took him back to my dad's where he was staying. He kept on vomiting all night. The next day I took him to hospital and he had to go on a drip

for eight hours because he was so dehydrated. After three days he stopped being sick, but was still very ill. There was some pressure for him to come back to work, but I put my foot down. We lost a week, but we got him well. It was very worrying, not just because of the film, but because Josh, who was by now my friend, was very sick. Luckily I didn't get whatever this bug was, but a lot of the crew came down with it as well.

Josh actually lost quite a lot of weight to play the role, but after that he'd lost even more. But because we shot chronologically, and because it happened at exactly the time Josh's character is going through something very difficult, it actually added to the story as he looked so emotionally wrecked.

Making a film is like herding cats. It's a brilliant experience but you are constantly making decisions and trying to get everyone working in the same way for the same goal. My favourite moment was when Alec birthed the lamb. He did it for real and everyone held their breaths as he was pulling it out. That was

very emotional. And when we were filming the ending, and Josh dragged this emotion out of himself, embarrassingly I cried after every take. I didn't tell anyone, I just took myself off and told everyone I was "a bit tired". That was an amazing moment.

*God's Own Country* premiered at the Sundance and Berlin film festivals earlier in the year. It's been an incredible journey as the film continues to tour the world and has been sold to most countries for a cinematic release. But the most gratifying experience is when someone comes up to me after seeing it and feels they have a personal connection to the characters. Often they open up enough to tell me their stories. I'm very lucky and pleased that I got to make the film I wanted to, in the way I wanted to tell it. It feels a real privilege to share the film with people around the world, opening up a small window into my world and the way I see it. ●

**GOD'S OWN COUNTRY IS IN CINEMAS FROM 1 SEPTEMBER AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 38**





SPOILER  
WARNING

# RE.VIEW

THE INDISPENSABLE GUIDE TO HOME ENTERTAINMENT

EDITED BY CHRIS HEWITT





# THE EMPIRE VIEWING GUIDE

## LIFE

Writers Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick on the year's other killer alien movie

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT



## 00:02:35

**ONE SHOT** — *Life* begins, not at 40, but with the attempts of astronauts on the ISS to catch an out-of-control vessel carrying samples from Mars. It's presented as one six-minute, 36-second shot by director Daniel Espinosa, but writers Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick suggested it be a 'oner' in their script. "It's easy to write it down," laughs Wernick. "Then someone's got to execute it and set the tone for the movie with all this craziness happening." >

THE EMPIRE VERDICT

LIFE

★★★

CERT 15

**What we said:** "Part *Alien*, part *Gravity*, just not as good as either of them. *Life* whips along at a decent pace and deploys enough engaging action sequences to make it work."

**Notable extras:** Some very brief featurettes and a few deleted scenes.





00:15:09

**CALVIN COOL-ISH** \_\_ Said vessel, the Pilgrim 7, carries the film's bête noire, a Martian organism that is initially nurtured by the space station crew as it grows. And grows. And grows. The creature is given its name by a group of schoolkids back on Earth. That name? Calvin. "It's a name from yesteryear. You don't hear of too many people called Calvin," says Wernick. "That felt cute to us."



00:36:21

**DEAD POOL** \_\_ In the first of several big shocks, Ryan Reynolds' Rory Adams comes off worst from a confrontation with Calvin. "We always like to break rules," says Wernick who, along with Reese, can't kill Reynolds, no matter how hard they try, in the *Deadpool* movies. "Killing an A-list movie star at the top, we thought, would really catch audiences off guard. We weren't Ryan's first on-screen death, but we are his favourite."



00:39:12

**GRISLY ADAMS** \_\_ The manner of Rory's death evolved over time. "In the original draft, Calvin dissolved his face," reveals Reese. "The idea was that the creature digested you by touch." That grisly death was shelved, and the writers brought forward the fate initially planned for Hiroyuki Sanada's Captain Murakami, wherein Calvin enters Rory's mouth. "It invoked horrible images without actually seeing what was happening."



00:50:20

**DROWNING BY NUMBERS** \_\_ Attempting to stop Calvin from gaining entry to the ISS, Russian astronaut Golovkina (Olga Dihovichnaya) sacrifices herself, dying in the most outlandish way: drowning in the leaked coolant of her spacesuit. Well, seemingly outlandish. "That nearly happened to an Italian astronaut on the ISS on a spacewalk," says Wernick. "We did our research and wanted to ground the movie and make it feel real."



01:01:29

**LOOK HUGH'S STALKING** \_\_ "We wanted to play on the trope of the locked-room mystery," says Reese of the scene where the surviving astronauts hole themselves up in a panic room, only to find Calvin with them, attached to the lower body of disabled British scientist Hugh Derry (Ariyon Bakare). "We thought, 'Here's this guy who can't feel his legs,' adds Wernick. "What's creepier than it being attached to him and him not knowing?"



01:19:45

**CHILD'S PLAY** \_\_ With only David (Jake Gyllenhaal) and Miranda North (Rebecca Ferguson) left alive, they pin their hopes on starving Calvin's oxygen supply. The unlikely inspiration? The children's book *Goodnight Moon* with its phrase, "Goodnight, air." It's a real work, by author Margaret Wise Brown, and "is a book I've read to my kids growing up," laughs Wernick. "It has a happier ending than the film."



01:29:46

**THE BIG SWITCH** \_\_ The movie thunders towards its climax as David hatches a grand plan: he will take a pod and fly himself, and Calvin, out into deep space, while Miranda will fly hers back to Earth. But then the pods collide, one spins out of control, and it's not revealed which until the last moment. "When you read the script, the reader experienced the same thing the viewer does," says Reese. "We wanted to mislead the audience."



01:33:57

**THE END OF LIFE** \_\_ "We wrote a pretty bleak, nihilistic movie and we wanted an ending to match," says Reese, and he's not joking. The final reveal: it's Miranda who is spinning into space, while David has landed on Earth, with a hungry Calvin on board. It's an ending so ballsy that Espinosa signed up to direct on the understanding it would not be changed. "Daniel loved it," adds Wernick. "It's the ending this movie deserves."



01:34:47

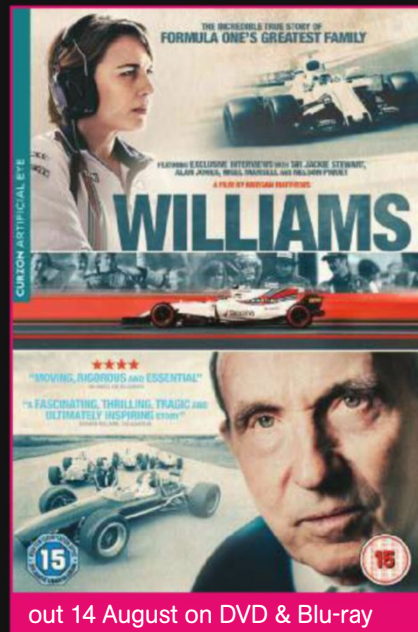
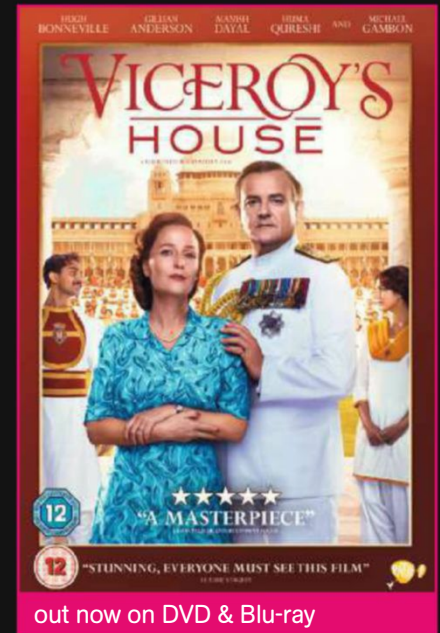
**A NEW LEASE?** \_\_ The film's final shot — of unsuspecting fishing boats closing in on David's pod — was crafted as a set-up for the further adventures of Calvin. "We have ideas for what might happen on Earth," says Reese. "I don't think our box office [\$100 million worldwide] is going to justify a sequel, sadly."

**LIFE IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD**



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# THE EMPIRE MASTERPIECE

## THE ROCK

When Bayhem wasn't a four-letter word

1996 / CERT 15

WORDS JONATHAN PILE

IN 1995, THE name “Michael Bay” meant something quite different to what it means today. The man who now makes “movies for teenage boys” (his words) was just a glint on his camera lens. Then a 30-year-old director with music video and advertising experience, he had just one film to his name — action comedy *Bad Boys*. It may have received (at best) mixed reviews, but he was an exciting young talent, with an obvious flair for visuals. And it didn't hurt that *Bad Boys* made over seven times its budget at the US box office. So naturally producers Jerry Bruckheimer and Don Simpson immediately hired him again. This time to direct *The Rock*.

*The Rock* holds a rarefied position in Bay's filmography. Of all the films he's directed — 13 over more than two decades — it's the only one

certified “Fresh” on reviews aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes. That 12 others — including *Armageddon*, the other film of his to be included in the prestigious Criterion Collection — didn't make the grade perhaps suggests it was by happy accident rather than design, but everything on *The Rock* worked. It's not just Bay's eye for an action sequence — it's Bay's eye for an action sequence married with a raft of pitch-perfect performances. It's not just a raft of pitch-perfect performances — it's a raft of pitch-perfect performances married with a witty, quotable script. It's not just a witty, quotable script... Well, you get the idea.

Not that the witty, quotable script came easily.

In 1994, writing partners David Weisberg





Rock stars  
Sean Connery and  
Nicolas Cage.

and Douglas Cook wrote a high-concept spec script which posited the idea, what if you had to break into the world's most notorious prison, Alcatraz? That was then rewritten by another writer, Mark Rosner. And these are the names you can see on the credits. But that doesn't tell the whole story.

"They cannot come out of the theatre and look their friends in the eye and say, 'I wrote *The Rock*,'" said Bay at the time. "Weisberg and Cook had a cool idea, but if you took either [of their drafts], it would have been a bad movie."

The Saturday before filming began, in fact, Simpson stormed up to Bay with 40 pages of notes on Rosner's final script and said, "We're taking our names off this project." Bruckheimer was more sanguine: "We'll fix it," he said.

And they did, bringing in *Die Hard* With A Vengeance writer Jonathan Hensleigh. And Aaron Sorkin. And Quentin Tarantino. And even *Porridge* duo Dick Clement and Ian La Frenais, brought in at Sean Connery's request before he'd agree to sign on. Ultimately, the Writers Guild Of America ruled at arbitration that credit should go to Rosney, Weisberg and Cook. Much to Bay's well-publicised disdain.

However, it was one of those rare instances where the "too many cooks" cliché doesn't ring true. Even star Nicolas Cage got in on the act, insisting on stripping all the swearing from his dialogue and creating quotable pearls in its place. So instead of the standard barrage of bad language, we're given, "gosh", "gee whizz", and, "How in the name of Zeus' BUTTHOLE did you get out of your cell?" His Beatles-loving, vinyl junkie, "chemical superfreak" Stanley Goodspeed is a character apart from the conventions of cinema's other FBI agents. Conversely, it's the familiarity of Connery's John Mason that makes him so compelling. An incarcerated MI6 spy accused of stealing J. Edgar Hoover's secret microfilm files, and held without proof or trial for 30 years, Connery played him as though he was an aged, alternative version of James Bond.

*The Rock's* character work is strong across the board — the memorable cast all given their own agendas. Mason wants freedom and to meet his grown-up daughter for the first time. FBI Director Womack (John Spencer) is evangelical in his zeal for keeping him captive. Paul the barber (Anthony Clark) just wants to know if Mason's happy with his haircut.

And then there's Ed Harris as Brigadier General Hummel. A nuanced, conflicted and sympathetic villain, he's motivated by the US government's treatment of its deceased black ops war heroes. When he says, "No benefits were paid to their families. No medals conferred. This situation is unacceptable," it's tough to disagree with him. It's as close as Bay gets to Ken Loach. And then, when he realises the government isn't going to blink, that the \$100 million he demanded isn't going to be paid, he's unwilling to carry out the threatened nerve gas strike on San Francisco. Defeated, he does the right thing and steps down. Told from another perspective, he could be the hero of this story. Simply put, it's not the explosions but what happens between them that makes *The Rock* rock. It seems to be something Michael Bay has forgotten. He could do with a reminder.

**THE ROCK IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY  
AND DOWNLOAD**

## KIDS WATCH CLASSICS

### Big films tackled by little people

ILLUSTRATION OLLY GIBBS



#### GENE SAUL – 6 WILLY WONKA & THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY

##### What did you think of the film, Gene?

I think it's very good and a bit... funny.

##### Who is your favourite character?

I like Charlie and his grandpa. They're nice. They're funny and they look after each other.

##### Did you like the Oompa-Loompas?

I love their songs. [Sings] "Oompa-Loompa, doopity-do..." They're very clever with words.

##### What do you think happens to the naughty children?

It doesn't show you. I think maybe they learn their lesson and go home.

##### Who is the naughtiest ticket winner?

Veruca Salt is the naughtiest and the rudest. She's so rude! She wants everything... and her dad never says, "no" to her. Ever. She really is a bad egg!

##### A lot of people find the film scary. Did you?

Yes. The bit at the beginning outside when the strange man says, "Nobody ever goes in and nobody ever comes out again," is the creepiest! Oh! And when they're on the boat on the chocolate river. It goes faster and faster until you're like, "AAAAAGH! STOOOOOPI!" I can't watch when it looks like Charlie and Grandpa are going to get chopped up by the massive fan when they're floating with the bubbles. That's the scariest bit.

##### There's another version of this film. Would you watch that?

Maybe. To see if it's as good.

##### Would you like to go to Willy Wonka's chocolate factory?

Yeah... but I'd definitely try to be good.



You're going to hear him roar! Kong makes his point.

# EASTER EGG ISLAND

Director Jordan Vogt-Roberts' map to the buried treasure of *Kong: Skull Island*

WORDS IAN FREER

JORDAN VOGT-ROBERTS' *Kong: Skull Island*, a fun, '70s-set reinvention of King Kong's origin story, may well boast the record for cinematic references, video-game winks and comic-book nods. "A great book is layered with symbolism and metaphors, just different textures," suggests the affable filmmaker. "When I am designing a movie I just love the idea of creating layers, some of which are intentional things for the fans and others are for myself, acknowledging the influences that have been meaningful to me." Here, the director calls out some obvious and not so obvious gems.



## JURASSIC LARK

As the Sky Devils, a 'Nam war helicopter squadron, take off for Skull Island, Samuel

L. Jackson's lieutenant colonel Preston Packard can clearly be heard to say, "Hold on to your butts," a line Jackson uttered to iconic effect in *Jurassic Park*. "I had [screenwriter] Derek Connolly put it in the script. I never thought it was going to stick. I didn't say anything about it, Sam didn't say anything about it. I tried so hard to get a *Big Lebowski*-John Goodman line but I couldn't find the right place for it."

## RETURN OF THE 'KINGS'

Hidden in the background of a street scene and nightclub in Saigon are Nick Robinson, Gabriel Basso and Moises Arias, the stars of Vogt-Roberts' coming-of-age debut, *The Kings Of Summer*. "That, to me, is a very personal thing," he says. "I flew them out myself. An enormous amount of brain power and logistics went into doing that but that's the stuff that matters to me. I wouldn't be surprised if putting them in all of my movies ends up being my thing."

## OLDBOY'S CLUB

Kong scoffing octopus was a piece of concept art that Vogt-Roberts latched onto early. "It's legitimately a slice of life, showing how difficult Kong's existence is. On the other hand, it is a nod

to the octopus fight in [*King*] *Kong Vs. Godzilla*, the Toho version. But for me it's a tribute to *Oldboy*." Vogt-Roberts later showed the scene to *Oldboy* director Park Chan-wook. "He thought it was funny, he made sure the lead actor [Choi Min-sik] saw it. He couldn't believe we spent so much money. It is by far the most expensive *Oldboy* reference on film."



## GOLD IS IN THE DETAILS

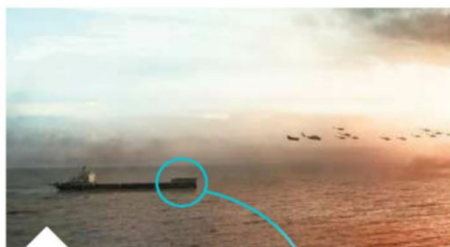
Keep 'em peeled in Marlow's (John C. Reilly) dwelling. You will not only see a replica of the camera used by Carl Denham in the 1933 *King Kong*, but on the record player is the reference number given to the ark of the covenant at the end of *Raiders*. "Any time there was random text on screen, why not do something?"





## GAME'S NOT OVER, MAN

*Kong: Skull Island* is stuffed with video-game ephemera. From mountains stolen directly from *Journey* ("My favourite piece of media in the last ten years") to the Sky Devils logo inspired by a crest in *Zelda*, Vogt-Roberts is determined to raise the bar for film/video-game interactions. "Normally video-games are as influential in my life as films."



## ALIEN RESURRECTION

During *Empire's* podcast interview, Vogt-Roberts teased a hidden *Alien* reference. "The 'A' on the side of the ship 'Athena' is in the same font as the *Alien* title font," he now reveals. But he also threw some shade *Prometheus* way. As the soldiers run away from Kong, a soldier heading in a straight line is killed. Vogt-Roberts, with his sound mixers, added the line, "Run to the side, you idiot," referencing the moment where Vickers (Charlize Theron) is crushed trying to outrun a falling ship. "There are few movies that have gone from, 'Holy fuck, this is incredible,' to being so unfathomably frustrating," Vogt-Roberts says of *Prometheus*. "So we just put in what the audience is saying in the theatre."

## STING IN THE TALE

"It went through a lot of variations," says Vogt-Roberts about the movie's post-credits scene, where Conrad (Tom Hiddleston) and Weaver (Brie Larson) discover there are more monsters than Kong. "There was a scene with Conrad and Weaver on a ship in the middle of the Arctic and — wait for it — Godzilla surfaces," says Vogt-Roberts. Presumably, though, Godzilla was unavailable for filming, the massive diva.

**KONG: SKULL ISLAND IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD**

THE  
EMPIRE  
VERDICT

KONG:  
SKULL ISLAND

★★★

CERT 12

**What we said:** "King Kong lives! But only just. This is an uneven adventure that's saved by the spectacle of its towering title character and the various beasts with whom he shares his island home."

**Notable extras:** Vogt-Roberts commentary, several featurettes, deleted scenes



# LISTEN TO YOUR FRIEND BILLY ZANE

He's a cool guy. He's trying to help you

Hi Billy,

I'm 15, and thinking of pursuing acting when I leave school. What books on acting would you recommend I read? Yours truly, **CY**

Most practically for film acting I would recommend Jeremiah Comey's *The Art Of Film Acting*. I like it so much I wrote the foreword for Mr Comey, one of my favourite teachers. For insight into the experience of stage acting, I would recommend you visit the RSC's gift shop and see what interesting accounts of that process the shelves feature. There are many. For a most unique study into the preparation process, taken to curious extremes, I recommend Antony Sher's account of his boldly committed turn as Richard III, called *Year Of The King*, whereby you will glimpse the most incredible commitment by a performer. Sir Antony went so far as to emaciate the musculature of his own legs while using crutches solely for mobility, for months, thus over-developing his upper-body strength to the temporary detriment of his lower half. Juicy stuff. But the best book someone considering a career as an actor should read is *How To Day Trade* by Ross Cameron. Not to discourage. Not a fall back. A parallel reality. Crush it and fund your own projects.

Hi Billy,

My wife wants kids. I'm not sure. I don't want this to cause tension, or break our marriage apart, but this doesn't seem like a topic on which there can be a happy middle ground. What are your thoughts? Yours, **MB**

If you are crazy about your woman, and can love and support her as she gets fully consumed by this life form for the next two years, do it. Because she will adore you for the Herculean effort you will make to provide for them. It will mine character in you that you never

knew you had, yet on a curious auto pilot, as if it is what we are hard-wired for as men. But don't buy that BS from your friends. They are rationalising about half of the joys of parenting. It's a shit show most of the time. Pure comic tragedy. But once you've bought the ticket you wouldn't trade it for the world, Daddy-O!

Hey Billy,

My high-school reunion is coming up soon, and I'm torn about attending. Mainly because I hated school, and can't imagine any of the people who made my life a living hell there have improved. On the other hand, I've become a relatively successful businessperson, and would relish the chance to rub my success in their faces. What would Billy Zane do? Thanks for your advice, **CJ**

This is why the world is in the state it's in, period. First world, school boy bullying, and the natural response to shove it in someone's face using money. Sorry for your lost youth but don't feed the beast. Break the chain, bro. You're right — they're probably the same assholes they were. Just look to any tool that is a so-called respectable professional now and they are behaving the exact way they did as kids. It just becomes unfortunate when they pursue stations of great influence in our culture without developing past that low character bar. So, go. You might be surprised by a turnaround. You may surprise yourself. But don't go with fear or hate in your heart, or they've won, way back then. Be bigger. Be unfazed. Let the clothes, shoes and great love or hot date you bring do the talking. Don't brag. Be humble. My favourite state in any situation? Bemused. Go get 'em, tiger. Zane, out.

SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO BILLY ZANE VIA [BILLY@EMPIREMAGAZINE.COM](mailto:BILLY@EMPIREMAGAZINE.COM). BILLY HAS DONATED HIS FEE FOR THIS COLUMN TO CHARITY



# THE LIVES OF BRYAN

From *Walter White* to *Dalton Trumbo*, Bryan Cranston looks back on his seven key roles

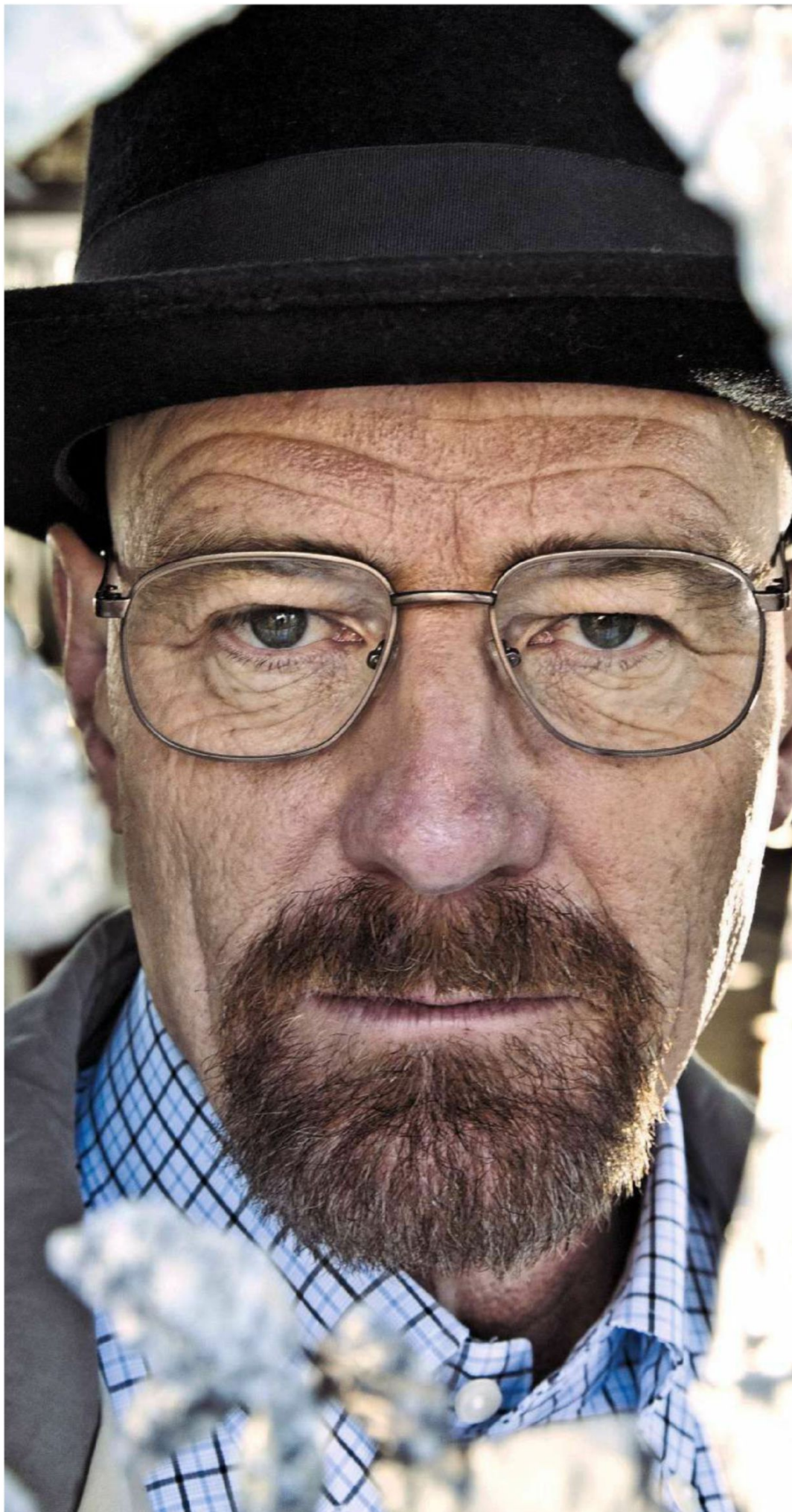
WORDS DAN JOLIN

AS ANY *BREAKING Bad* fan knows, Bryan Cranston doesn't shy away from exploring the darker recesses of the human soul. For his latest film, Robin Swicord's E.L. Doctorow-adapting *Wakefield*, Cranston tackles arguably his least likeable lead character yet: a family man who not only abandons his wife and daughters, but cynically watches them from his nearby hidey-hole. But, Cranston tells *Empire*, "It's the actor's job to find the humanity in every character you play." Something he's consistently achieved throughout his career. Here he talks us through how he does it.

**PATRICK CRUMP** — *THE X-FILES*, 'DRIVE', 1998

The Vince Gilligan-written role that paved the way to Cranston's casting in *Breaking Bad*: Patrick Crump, an anti-Semitic jerk who can't stop driving for fear his head will explode.

"When you're playing the antagonist, you can't play it as if you're evil and mean, unless you're playing farce, or a child's story. It's Vince's writing that enabled me to conjure that man and bring that sense of playing his humanity. Every actor knows that the hardest work you ever have to do is on poorly written material. The easiest work is when the material is so well written that it just seeps into your psyche immediately."







**Left:** Achieving legend status as *Breaking Bad*'s morally complex, magnetic Walter White.

**Above, top to bottom:** As *Wakefield*'s title character, another family man with issues; With Ryan Gosling in *Drive*; As *Trumbo*'s controversial Hollywood screenwriter; Dysfunctional — if comedic — family life again in TV's *Malcolm In The Middle*.

### HAL — *MALCOLM IN THE MIDDLE*, 2000-'06

Malcolm's inept and sometimes infantile father, Hal, was Cranston's biggest TV role pre-Walter White...

"Doing *Malcolm In The Middle* was a joy. Seven years, 151 episodes, the exploration of which was thorough and beautiful, so well-crafted, and grounded. In that show, the family loved each other. But we didn't pound you over the head with it. We just let you know that we loved each other, and because you felt that as an audience, we were able to go crazy. Because they knew that, at the end of the day, they're gonna stay together. That was comforting to people."

### WALTER WHITE — *BREAKING BAD*, 2008-'13

The role of his lifetime: the cancer-suffering chemistry teacher who becomes a crystal meth manufacturer to support his family, but soon evolves into a notorious villain.

"The most harrowing experience I had on *Breaking Bad* was during the scene when Jane [Krysten Ritter] was dying and I saw the face of my real daughter dying before me. And that shook me, of course. It was almost like an out-of-body experience; your body and your emotional core doesn't really know the difference between acting and not-acting. You feel the jolt of that. There are those experiences you have that are not completely safe. That's an emotional risk that an actor needs to accept."

### SHANNON — *DRIVE*, 2011

Mechanic and manager for Ryan Gosling's getaway artist in Nicolas Winding Refn's neo-noir, who gets a disturbing death scene at the hands of Albert Brooks' gang boss. "I came up with that death scene. Originally in

the script I think Shannon was garroted, and there was something that bothered me about that. What we'd established was Albert Brooks' character really liked me. So one rehearsal I said, 'What if he offers me his hand, the symbol of friendship? We're looking at each other as friends and I shake his hand and he quickly twists my hand and with an unforeseen knife he slices my wrist. And then immediately starts to comfort me.' It's just a *horrific* thing to see, but from Albert's character's standpoint it was him honouring a friendship."

### DALTON TRUMBO — *TRUMBO*, 2015

His performance as the blacklisted Hollywood screenwriter earned Cranston a Best Actor Oscar nomination.

"Trumbo was someone I knew about, but didn't know that much about. So I contacted the people who wrote things about him, read a biography on him, saw the documentary about him and talked to both of his daughters, who were extremely helpful. This is how you create your character: you gather evidence and try to decipher what it means to you. It's almost like doing an investigation on a case. And I learned that Trumbo was not only bright and prolific but stubborn, irascible, fun-loving. A dedicated humanist and enlightened being who truly enjoyed his wordsmithing ability."

### LYNDON B. JOHNSON — *ALL THE WAY*, 2016

Playing JFK's controversial successor on stage won Cranston a Tony Award in 2014, and he reprised the role for *Trumbo* director Jay Roach's HBO movie last year, in which we memorably observe LBJ sitting down for a crap, mid-conversation...

"Oh yeah, he was not a man who was raised with any kind of high-end social grace. So when he needed to go to the bathroom, he would bring people with him. And he'd drop his drawers and defecate and continue talking as if it was no big deal. But some people speculated that he did it to put his guests on their heels, so he could manipulate them."

### HOWARD WAKEFIELD — *WAKEFIELD*, 2016

A husband and father who stages his own disappearance, camping out in his garage while he obsessively spies on his wife and daughters.

"A very challenging character. I believe he's plausible to some degree, and ultimately relatable, when you think about it. Who wouldn't want to take a snow day for themselves? But I'm a husband and a father, and my father abandoned my family, so I looked at this and thought, 'How can I play a person who abandons his family?' Because it happens. Because people do that. So, I can't just push it aside because it's a repugnant thought. I kept thinking about it and coming back to the script, and realised that if I'm doing that it's a great sign. It's getting embedded in my psyche."

**WAKEFIELD IS OUT NOW ON DVD AND DOWNLOAD**



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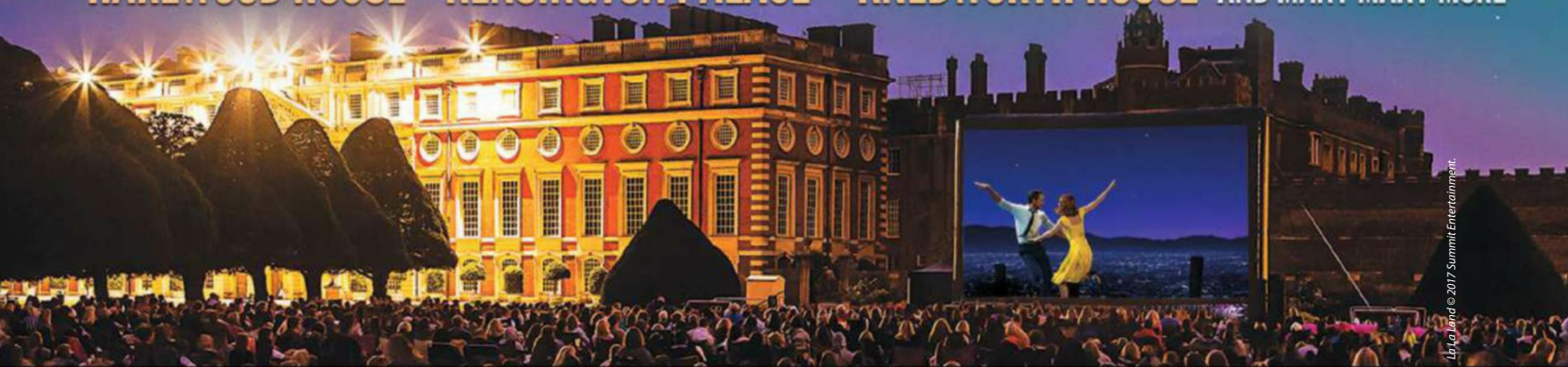
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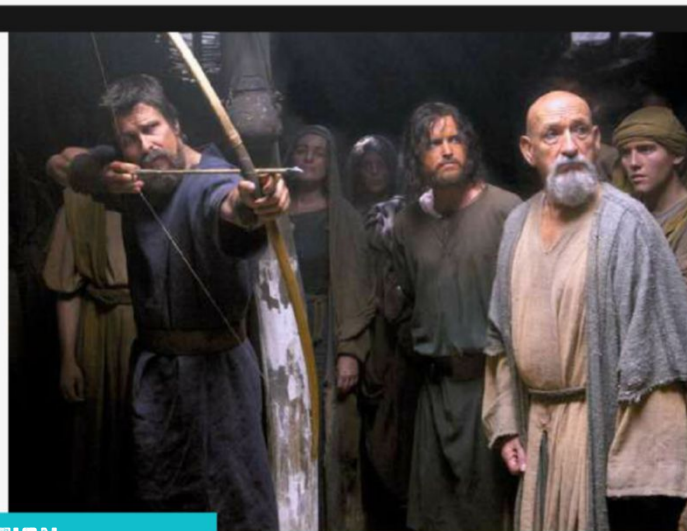
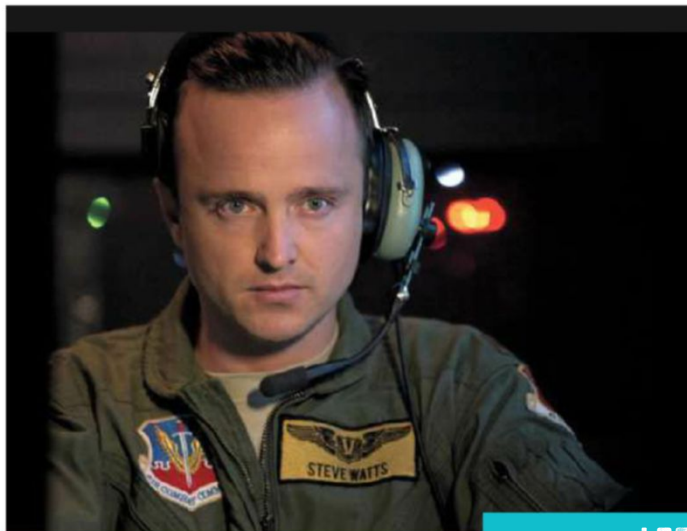




# BEST OF TIMES | WORST OF TIMES

AARON PAUL

WORDS IAN FREER



## LOCATION

I've just shot *Welcome Home* in this beautiful Italian town, in Umbria right next to Tuscany. I was out there for five weeks. That was cool. I've also shot out in South Africa a few times, *Eye In The Sky* most recently, and just really loved it, loved the people out there. It was beautiful.

Not to shit on the place because I loved the people there, but The Canary Islands on *Exodus: Gods And Kings*. I'm a foodie and where we shot there was no food around so you could only put two pieces of bread together. It was also full of soft dirt that you'd walk through and create dust clouds.

## COSTUME

I've got to be honest, anytime I put on my meth suit on *Breaking Bad*, it felt good. Putting on that yellow suit and walking onto the lab set, I loved it. I felt *Breaking Bad* had such incredible costumes and during the first couple of seasons, putting on Jesse's attire was so special, it was just over-the-top. I had so much fun.



I did this film years ago — I can't remember the title — that takes place in the late '70s, so I had to wear platform shoes and the most ridiculous gaudy threads. I had little tiny springs pulling in my hair as well, so it was very uncomfortable.

I've never seen that movie simply because I looked like such an idiot.

## FAN ENCOUNTER

I was on set once and there was an older woman who was so nice, so frail. I ended up walking over to her and she told me what a huge fan she was of mine. She took a picture and I hugged her. She asked me to quote some of Jesse Pinkman's lines. Having a 94-year-old woman being an obsessed *Breaking Bad* fan seemed so funny to me.

I've had to FaceTime some drunk guy's brother while eating my dinner.

We also had three fans crash our wedding. We had a 1920s Parisian Carnival theme and these people were in standard wedding attire. They stood out like a sore thumb. One girl nearly caught my wife's bouquet. We didn't know it happened until we looked back at our wedding photos.

## AUDITION

I used to go into auditions and just muddle through these scenes, apologising to the people I was auditioning in front of. So I would have to say *Breaking Bad*, because even though it wasn't that great an audition, it changed my life.



I auditioned for *Cloverfield* with J.J. Abrams. On *Mission: Impossible 3* J.J. had got me to do a magic trick in front of Tom Cruise and the entire crew which failed miserably. He reminded me of this and I completely lost my train of thought... I just gave up, said, "I'm sorry," and walked out.

## MOMENT

I guess it was when I realised it was not a fight anymore. Maybe it was when I won my first Emmy [in 2010]. It was a real moment in my life. It's not about the award as such, it was just a fun night. In the end there was something magical about it.

I've had ups and downs in my career but always paid my bills. I guess when I asked my parents for a loan, that was the low point.



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# MOVIE MEMOIRS

Robert De Niro's  
Mike, broken by war.

Sali Hughes on the films that shaped her life

## #15 THE FILM YOU CAN'T LEAVE ALONE – THE DEER HUNTER



ILLUSTRATION DAVID MAHONEY

HAVE YOU EVER had a friend whom you love, think charming, incomparably wise, intelligent, insightful or interesting, but can only face seeing once a year, maybe even less? It's not that you'd want to imagine the world without them in it, but seeing them can wring dry your emotional core for several weeks? Well, this is essentially how I feel about *The Deer Hunter*, Michael Cimino's 1978 epic about a group of friends from a close-knit community of Russian-Americans in a Pennsylvania steelworks town, who leave their families to fight in Vietnam. Over three-plus-change harrowing hours, Cimino,

through his extraordinarily talented cast including Christopher Walken, Robert De Niro, John Cazale (already suffering from terminal cancer during filming) and his fiancée, theatre-actor Meryl Streep in her first substantial film role, delivers one gut-punch after another. From the terrifying swamp scene in which the friends are held captive in a rat-infested bamboo cage to await their execution, to the horrific and iconic denouement (SPOILER), where Mike (De Niro), finger on trigger, face in abject despair, confronts his dead-eyed, PTSD-suffering soulmate, Nick (Walken), in a game of Russian Roulette. One viewing of *The Deer Hunter* is enough to scar the soul so why, I wonder, have I willingly reopened the wound even once, never mind every couple of years?

The same question can be asked of my repeated viewings of *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, *Nil By Mouth* and *Dumbo* (yeah, you read that right. I make no apology). These are the films guaranteed to break me and yet no sooner have I put myself back together, I'm halting the channel hop and deciding once more won't hurt. I'll sit through each like someone sloshing greedily through a vineyard in the belief that a hangover will never come. But it always does. As the titles roll, I despair at the injustice, political neglect, disempowerment of ordinary people, at human beings' seemingly endless capacity to hurt one

another (and baby circus elephants), and wonder why I can't just get my thrills from the *American Pie* franchise or one of the many variations on *Dude, Where's My Car?*. Am I just a glutton for punishment, or, in making me feel terrible, is *The Deer Hunter* serving an important purpose? The truth is that in forcing my anguish, outrage and heartbreak, Cimino's masterpiece makes me feel alive. I'm hardly one for spiritual awakenings, but Nicky's numb, exploited, shell-shocked indifference to his impending death makes me confront how much I still care about mine. My capacity for anger over the wasted lives of the Vietnam war reinvigorates my rage at modern US policy, and reminds me that nothing is hopeless, everything will ultimately change. But I'd be lying if I claimed the appeal of films that make me feel terrible is entirely noble. Sometimes, I feel suitably miserable that I want to wallow in the power of it all, to have the wind knocked out of my sails, to cry with impunity and the separation afforded by an LCD screen. I want to pour petrol on my hopelessness, through the artfully controlled use of fictionalised images and stories, whose visceral effects I know will nonetheless be temporary. I choose to be floored by my own feelings, then left to reflect and rebuild, my perspective re-calibrated for another couple of years. Film can do that like nothing else. That's why we keep on pulling the trigger.



## SILICON VALLEY: SEASON 4

The Pied Piper team's ups and downs



### 1 \_ DESPERATE DINESH

Mike Judge's HBO sitcom saw some of its supporting cast rise in Season 4. After Kumail Nanjiani's Dinesh falls for a hacker, Mia (Phoebe Neidhardt), he panics about server-based retribution should they ever break up... so nobly grasses her up to the FBI in episode five.



### 2 \_ GARAGE ROCKS

Episode five has Richard (Thomas Middleditch) and his Pied Piper team explore a partnership with rival Gavin Belson (Matt Ross). The opening teaser scene shows Belson give the lads a tour of his childhood garage, with the hilarious big reveal: it's contained within a much larger garage, filled with billionaire boys' toys.



### 3 \_ BACHMAN OVERDRIVE

T.J. Miller's pothead Erlich Bachman leaves in a blaze. Not necessarily of glory, but certainly the giggles, as he descends into an opium haze in a Tibetan retreat. After four seasons, Miller's star had risen, while Bachman had become peripheral; probably the best decision all round.

SILICON VALLEY SEASON 4 IS OUT NOW ON  
DOWNLOAD



Tom Meeten as  
homicide detective  
Chris. Below: Alice  
Lowe is Kathleen, his  
co-investigator in  
a complex case.

## GHOUL GUIDE

Gareth Tunley shot *The Ghoul* in ten days. Here's his six-step plan to creating a no-budget miracle

WORDS SIMON CROOK

### 1. FAKE IT

"When you're skint, you have to innovate. Take the night-drive scene at the end of the film. That was Tom [Meeten, who plays undercover cop Chris] in a parked car in Twickenham, with our producer using two torches gaffer-taped to a box. Stand behind the car, sway from side to side and you recreate the effect of passing headlights."

### 2. CAST YOUR FRIENDS

"Anyone can make a film using the resources you have. *The Ghoul* cost a fag and a fiver. I've known Tom and Alice Lowe [who plays Chris' former colleague and ex, Kathleen] since the early 2000s when we were doing the Ealing Live sketch show, so it's helped being part of this emerging British indie scene. Tom's famous for his grotesque comedy characters, and wasn't an obvious choice to play a muted cop, but holy shit, I was lucky. He's a brilliant actor."

### 3. INVENT YOUR OWN SHOTS

"The high-angles of Tom walking the streets were a poor man's crane shot — or, more accurately, me dangling out of the window of my flat with a camera. We were constantly inventing stuff on the hoof. I had an elaborate montage planned for a party scene but we ran out of time. So I took the shot-list, filmed it as one scene and created a new technique: I call it the mono-tage."



### 4. GET BEN WHEATLEY ON SPEED DIAL

"Being cast in *Down Terrace* was a galvanising moment for me: Ben Wheatley proved you can make great cinema for next to nothing. As executive producer, Ben helped get *The Ghoul* a distributor but he has this ruthless editor's eye. He hacked away stuff I was clinging onto that should never have been in the film."

### 5. GO GUERRILLA

"We stole shots all over London, constantly moving, lest somebody stop us filming. The forest scene was a tiny copse in Wandsworth Common. It's the magic of cinema: we just made the same trees look like a forest by shooting them at different angles."

### 6. AND USE YOUR LOCAL

"The occult stuff is all historically accurate. I even had a magic consultant — well, a bloke I met in the pub who was into the occult. The dialogue about a magic spell to keep Hitler from invading Britain is all true but originally I got the names wrong. My bloke-in-the pub corrected it. My magic consultant basically cost a pint."

THE GHOUL IS OUT ON 4 SEPTEMBER ON DVD,  
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# STORY OF THE SHOT

## BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN

WORDS IAN FREER

WHAT DO THE following flicks have in common? *Foreign Correspondent*, *The Godfather*, *The Untouchables*, *Revenge Of The Sith* and *The Naked Gun 33 1/3*. The answer is they all worship at the altar of *Battleship Potemkin*'s Odessa Steps sequence. One of the most revered, imitated set-pieces in cinema history, it sees tsarist soldiers open fire on a crowd of mutinous civilians in the port of Odessa. The sequence remains a dazzling showcase of director Sergei Eisenstein's ability to elevate indelible images, including the iconic baby rolling down the steps in a pram, through stunning editing (montage) techniques. But despite its totemic status, it wasn't even in Eisenstein's original screenplay.

"It's a very improvised sequence," says Ian Christie, author of *Eisenstein Rediscovered*. "Once he decided to do it, he threw himself into it. He makes sure he gets the key shots he needs to get to punctuate the sequence — the baby, the pram, the woman shot through the pince-nez — that give it such bite, such edge."

So ingrained is the sequence in the cultural consciousness, it is still surprising the Odessa Steps massacre never actually happened. It's a complete Eisenstein fabrication spun from the actual 1905 mutiny. Legend has it Eisenstein came up with the idea as he stood at the top of the steps spitting out cherry stones and watching them bounce down the steps (hence the pram). The reality is more prosaic. The scene was inspired by an illustration of a Cossack slashing at civilians on the steps and Eisenstein's own sense of "the run of the steps" while visiting the location.

"There were weather problems, problems in getting to Odessa in time," says Christie about capturing the massacre. "It was shot fairly quickly."

Eisenstein and DP Édouard Tissé threw out the tripod, strapping the camera to acrobats and lowering the camera team over wooden platforms by means of pulleys and ropes. The crowd were marshalled by the Iron Five, not a Marvel franchise but Eisenstein's quintet of assistant directors (Grigori Alexandrov, Maxim Strauch, Mikhail Gomorov, Alexander Antonov, Alexander Liovshin) who all dressed in striped T-shirts and pumped up the throng with a 35-man brass band. Eisenstein had his own way to rally the extras, shouting out, "How about showing a little more pep, Comrade Prokopenko?!" to convince the mob he could pick out individuals. The crowd would subsequently redouble their efforts.

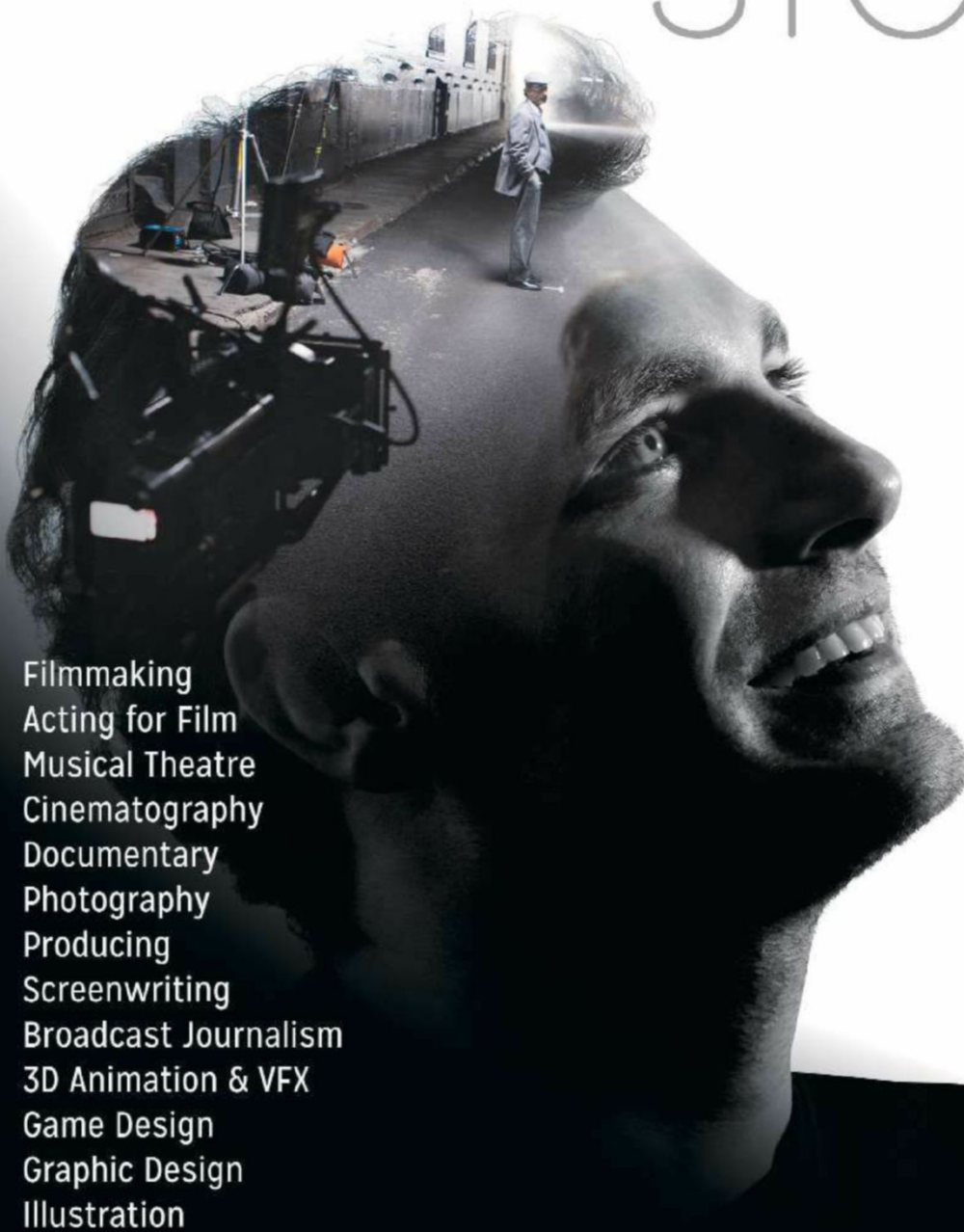
The sequence has inspired filmmakers but also creatives as diverse as Francis Bacon and Pet Shop Boys, who wrote a new electronic score for the film in 2004, replete with actual gunshot fire for the marching soldiers. The sequence stayed with Eisenstein too. The filmmaker later wrote an essay that wondered whatever happened to the extras, including the baby in the runaway pram. If that baby — who would be 92 — is your great uncle, write to [iveonlygoneandfoundthefuckingpotemkinbaby@empire.com](mailto:iveonlygoneandfoundthefuckingpotemkinbaby@empire.com).

**BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY, DOWNLOAD AND FREE ON YOUTUBE**



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# BINGEWATCH

Each month, our marathon man runs the cinematic equivalent of 26.2 miles. Pray for him.

## THIS MONTH: NICOLAS CAGE DTV MOVIES

WORDS SIMON CROOK ILLUSTRATION PETER STRAIN

IT'S A TOUGH time to be a Nic Cage fan. After splurging his fortune on dinosaur skulls, shrunken pygmy heads and America's most haunted house, Cage's financial woes have resulted in a manic pile-up of DTV releases to pay off the debts — this year alone, Cage will blurt out *seven* movies. Question is, do the films match the talent? If the following marathon proves anything, Cage switches genres more times than most people change socks, swinging from horror to thriller, action to comedy, biopic to disaster flick.

Let's start with a disaster. And boy, is it a disaster. *USS Indianapolis: Men Of Courage* (2016) subjects Cage to shipwrecks, sharks and Microsoft Paint-level CGI in a dramatisation of the World War II naval tragedy. Remember Quint's *Jaws* monologue? There's more tension in two syllables of Robert Shaw's speech than two hours of this titanic misfire. Still, Cage puts on a brave face. Or at least a face. Cage is so inexpressive he looks like an Easter Island Statue contemplating a sudoku.

I'm hoping the worst is already over when along comes *Left Behind* (2014), an apocalyptic Godbuster depicting The Rapture as a spiritual alien abduction. While all non-Christians are cursed, the blessed evaporate up to paradise, leaving a crumple of clothes where their bodies used to be, implying heaven is a giant nudist colony.

Cage's Rayford Steele is piloting a passenger jet when salvation strikes, and spends most of his time in the cockpit, hiding from the rest of the movie.

The unholy purgatory continues with *Pay The Ghost* (2015), which sees Cage searching for his son after he's snatched at a Halloween carnival. Pestered by haunted scooters, CG vultures and broken-plumbing sound design, the hunt leads him to a vengeful witch. Okay, so the final act plunges into a portal of stupid, but the 11 per cent rating on Rotten Tomatoes smacks of a critical pile-on: it's an imperfectly enjoyable spook-'em-up.

Paul Schrader's *Dog Eat Dog* (2016) spent one lonely day in a London cinema before vaporising onto DVD, but I'm so burned out I stick it on in the hope it provides welcome quality. It does, just. After three earnest Nic performances, he *finally* unleashes the HurriCage as a coke-boggled ex-con leading a baby-napping heist. The lurid violence sees even the plot run off screaming, but the movie zaps with electric, amoral aggression.

The buzz doesn't last. *Tokarev* (2014) is Cage's entry in the Mad Dad genre and is clearly Taken the piss. Convinced his daughter's been murdered by the Russian Mob, Nic puts on his Leather Action Jacket, flicks his Elvis hair and goes on the rampage with a jewel-encrusted knife. I'm still nursing a bruised nose after its face-palming

final twist, but there's a priceless moment when Cage asks what the kidnappers *smell* like. "Spicy food?" he screams. "TOO MUCH COLOGNE?"

The thing is with Cage, you're always primed for that flash of fearless genius and it hits in *Army Of One* (2016). Larry Charles' biopic tells the ridiculous true story of Gary Faulkner, whose plan to kill Bin Laden involved hang-gliding from Israel into Pakistan armed with a samurai sword. Co-starring Russell Brand as God, the movie's a mess, but Cage extracts at least five belly laughs from his berserk, helium-voiced take on Faulkner. It's one of those performances no other A-listers would even think of — all strange honks, bum notes and squeaky highs, and annoyingly fabulous.

Tragically, the binge wheezes to a close with his latest, *Inconceivable* (2017) — a Nanny From Hell movie that pairs Cage with Gina Gershon as a married couple who unwisely hire Nicky Whelan as a surrogate mother. It's tempting to retile this mega-dirge Foetal Attraction but that implies excitement, and *Inconceivable* is a symphony of beige. I find myself fixating on the exotic geometry of Cage's hairline, which seems to resemble the bat signal. Who knows? Maybe it's a cryptic cry for help. I know how he feels.

**INCONCEIVABLE IS OUT ON 28 AUGUST ON DVD**





# BULLETS TIME

Director Ben Wheatley on the killer shots of *Free Fire* WORDS CHRIS HEWITT

THERE ARE 312 shots fired in anger (and panic, and fear, and rank incompetence) in *Free Fire*, Ben Wheatley's riotous tale of an arms deal-turned-shoot-out. But not all those bullets have the same impact. Wheatley talks us through the bullets that matter the most.



## SHOT #1

Harry shoots Stevo

Things kick off when Harry (Jack Reynor) shoots Stevo (Sam Riley) in the upper chest as payback for Stevo's unprovoked attack on Harry's cousin in a Boston bar.

"It was always going to be those two characters because they're the least sensible. The hard bit of that was making sure that Jack Reynor's performance was internal enough that you could buy that he would go that crazy. Originally, the insult Stevo lobs at him wasn't enough. I'd had

a few goes, then Ames [Amy Jump, Wheatley's writing and editing partner, and wife] rewrote it and she came up with, 'About last night, I'm really sorry. 'Cause I came so hard in your cousin's mouth that I think I knocked some of her rotten fucking teeth out! You're gonna have to pick 'em out of her fucking stools at the hospital!' Everyone read it and went, 'Fuck! That's pretty bad!'"

**THE OUTCOME:** UPPER RIGHT CHEST; WOUND

## SHOT #3

Stevo shoots Vern

In the opening exchange of fire, Wheatley is at pains to ensure his main characters were all wounded in some way — usually the legs or arms, as Sharlto Copley's gunrunner finds out.

"You can't have everyone shot in the head because you'll run out of cast. You can't have them all shot in the guts because it's really



painful. But the idea was that it's quite hard to shoot things that are moving at speed. Stevo fires and misses a few times before hitting anything. It's adrenaline and fear and pressure. It's very difficult to do unless you're a trained commando."

**THE OUTCOME:** LEFT SHOULDER; WOUND



## SHOT #26

Chris shoots Martin

The first manstopper of the movie, and inadvertent Coldplay riff, sees Cillian Murphy's Republican take out Martin (Babou Ceesay), one of the guys who brokered the deal. Martin's not quite dead, although that's not revealed until later.

"For the plot, it was important to take Martin out. And we wanted to make it much more serious — nobody can get out of it now. There's no going back. That's the end of their chances.





**Clockwise from left:** Aim, fire! Gordon (Noah Taylor), Harry (Jack Reynor), Vernon (Sharlto Copley) and Ord (Armie Hammer); Frank (Michael Smiley) with Chris (Cillian Murphy); Justine (Brie Larson).

And Martin has a relationship with Justine [Brie Larson], and Chris has a nascent relationship with her. So Chris shoots the boyfriend straight at the start, and it pans out badly for him..."

**THE OUTCOME:** HEAD; APPARENTLY FATAL

## SHOT #51

Howie shoots Gordon

The sudden arrival of two snipers on the scene, planned as part of a double-cross by Martin and Justine, complicates matters. Not least when Howie (Patrick Bergin) sends a bullet into the leg of Gordon (Noah Taylor). "Okay, this is probably one of the first totally unrealistic wounds in the film. That would be totally unsurvivable — it would have shattered his leg and that would have been the end of him..."

**THE OUTCOME:** RIGHT LEG; APPARENTLY FATAL



## SHOT #114

Harry shoots Justine

Chalk up another one for Jack Reynor's agent of chaos, who accidentally shoots Justine in the right leg, despite ostensibly being on the same side.

"It's typical of the uselessness of Harry. Justine is fucked off that she was defending his cousin earlier. But this gets quite an interesting reaction in the audience, usually. 'You're not allowed to shoot women!' But it's not a fatal wound, and it's an accident."

**THE OUTCOME:** RIGHT LEG; WOUND



## SHOT #163

Vern shoots Bernie

Farewell, then, to Enzo Cilenti, whose nervous Nellie tries to make a very slow break for it, walking to freedom until Vern shoots him in the back. The rotter.

"Vern has been so singularly useless at hitting

anything to this point. The irony is that he murders the unarmed guy — the only character who doesn't have a gun, or fire a gun. Bernie's attempt to escape was based around a thing I did as a kid. I'd thrown some apples under a car, the car screeched to a halt and I hid in the woods. After a while I thought, 'If I just walk away really slowly I'll be fine.' At which point I got caught."

**THE OUTCOME:** BACK; FATAL



## SHOT #167

Justine shoots Howie

A mystery, as Bergin's wounded Howie is put out of his misery just as he's about to reveal who hired him. Spoiler: it's Justine.

"It's a very sneaky shot — she slid around the corner. The only language of the film that tells you she did it is a big close-up of her just before. It's about the biggest close-up of the movie. Justine is the only character in the film who shoots straight and she also kills the most people. It's like a remake of *Alien*, where she's Ripley and the alien at the same time."

**THE OUTCOME:** HEAD; FATAL



## SHOT #244

Harry shoots Ord

Another accidental discharge from the hairtrigger of Harry, as he shoots Armie Hammer's super-cool, highly trained Ord (again, who's on his side) in the leg.

"There's another version of this film, made in the '70s maybe, where Ord is the star of it. It's almost like it should be his film, but the other characters drag him down. And this is like a moment from *Die Hard*, but as Bruce Willis goes to fight Alan Rickman, Rickman blows his toes off. Also, we realised Ord hadn't been shot in the leg and he was mobile. In the land of the blind, the two-legged man is king, so we had to disable him somehow."

**THE OUTCOME:** RIGHT LEG; WOUND





## SHOT #331

— Vern shoots Frank

As the bullets finally start to run out, the body count begins to rise. Michael Smiley's likeable, loquacious Frank is taken out by Vern after a desperate scramble to reach the warehouse's still-working phone...

"The idea for the film was a series of really small adventures, but they mean masses to these people because their lives have been boiled down to hardly anything. Frank trying to reach the phone would be a tower block being hit by a meteorite in a Michael Bay film. You think he's got there and then he hasn't. It's really unfair. It's just fucking totally unfair."

THE OUTCOME: HEART; FATAL



## SHOT #338

— Chris shoots Vern

Vern's boat race is run when, to add insult to the massive burns he received during his fight with Frank, Chris shoots him. Not just in the face, but through the nose.

"I'd read that to definitely stop someone with one bullet, you go through the nose. It goes through the brain and cuts out the middle of the brain, which runs the nervous system. It's really horrible. It's such an insult to shoot someone right in the middle of their face, but Chris is upset about Frank."

THE OUTCOME: HEAD; FATAL

## SHOT #353

— Stevo shoots Harry

As the conflict began with Stevo and Harry, so it comes to an end, with the duo killing each other in suitably OTT fashion: Harry crushing Stevo's head by driving a van over his face, while Stevo, with his last act, fires a bullet into Harry's arse. Yep...

"I don't know why being shot in the buttock is lethal. But it's a high-calibre pistol so it could do a lot of damage. Stevo goes out as he went in, as an idiot. He's caused so much trouble with his mouth and he just gets smeared flat."



Ben Wheatley on set with Enzo Cilenti (Bernie), Michael Smiley (Frank) and Sam Riley (Stevo).



Originally, Stevo just got shot in the original script. But Jack said, 'I'll do it if I get to kill Stevo in a really horrible way.' I said, 'What if he gets his head run over?' He said, 'I'll do it.' I had to perform the test of the rigged van. Having a real van rolling over you, that for some reason doesn't pop your head, was really scary."

THE OUTCOME: BUTTOCK; FATAL

## SHOT #354

— Justine shoots Ord

With everyone seemingly dead, and the warehouse in an even greater state of disrepair, Ord and Chris forge a cautious truce and prepare to leave. Until Ord is rudely interrupted mid-John Denver anecdote. By a bullet to his eye, courtesy of the lurking Justine...

"No-one's very happy about that, because they really like Armie. He's done nothing wrong in the whole film, he's got no bad agenda, and then he gets shot in the eye. And he ain't coming back with an eyepatch. There never was a John Denver story — that was something we made up on the day. But if there had been one, it would have been quite filthy."

THE OUTCOME: HEADSHOT; FATAL



## SHOT #355

— Justine shoots Chris

Immediately after shooting Ord, Justine also plugs Chris in the chest, this time from a distance with a sniper rifle. But despite this the Irishman actually has a grudging respect for her as she prepares to abscond with the big bag of cash...

"There's a mean version of this where Chris shoots her in the back as she leaves. That would be horrible. But Chris is a bit of a romantic. It's wrong time, wrong place. They could maybe have been alright if they'd met in a bar. But they didn't, and that's how it ends. He might make it out alive — I don't know what the percentage survival chances are if you get shot just under the heart. I suspect not good, but there's a chance for a sequel..."

THE OUTCOME: CHEST; ALMOST CERTAINLY FATAL

FREE FIRE IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD



FREE FIRE

★★★★

CERT 15

**What we said:** "Wheatley continues an unbroken run of quality, helped by a great cast and a startlingly effective premise. This is seriously cool, stuffed with great dialogue and riddled with bullets."

**Notable extras:**

Commentary from Wheatley, and a making of featurette.



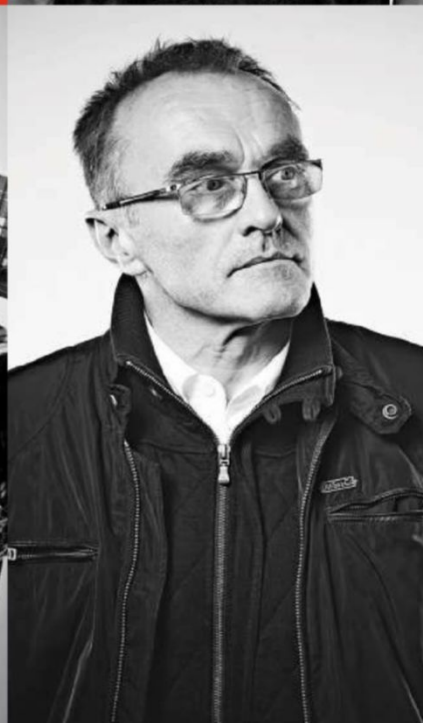


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# MY MOVIE MASTERMIND

LONE SCHERFIG

Will the Danish director be a lone survivor?

WORDS IAN FREER



## LEADER BOARD

Ben Kingsley	9.5
Christopher Lee	9.5
David O. Russell	9.5
Quentin Tarantino	9.5
Paul W.S. Anderson	9
Werner Herzog	9
Robert Rodriguez	9
Guillermo del Toro	9
Bryan Singer	8.5
Christian Slater	8.5

**1** In World War II drama *Their Finest*, Sam Claflin tells Gemma Arterton, "Films are like life with the boring bits cut out." Who originated that quote?

Alfred Hitchcock. It's an anachronism. Hitchcock is a big influence on me. I've taught some of his work. The *Hitchcock/Truffaut* book is still the best film book I own.

**Correct.**

**2** "Pancreas", "woman's handball team", "sorbet". These IMDb plot keywords describe which film?

I don't know. [*Hears answer*] Ah yes, it is the mother who has pancreatitis but it is also a disease that turns up in *Wilbur Wants To Kill Himself*.

**The correct answer is *Italian For Beginners*.**

**3** In *The Riot Club*, how does Alistair (Sam Claflin) correct the mugger who wants to take his bank details?

He says, "If you say 'PIN number', you're saying 'number' twice. You're saying, 'personal identification number number.'" Lines just stick to you and little by little you forget some lines but not the whole.

**Correct.**

**4** Tell us one of the two poster taglines for *Wilbur Wants To Kill Himself*.

There were a number of different posters. 'Meet a man dying to live.' Could be the Scottish one or the British one. What's the other one? [*Hears answer*] Ah yes, I like that better. The title was

a mistake. I really, really love that film and I think it would have found a bigger audience with a different title.

**Correct. The other tagline is "The life he wanted to end was just about to begin."**

**5** In *Just Like Home*, the town orphan played by Peter Gantzler thinks he is addicted to drugs but what is he actually addicted to?

It's junior aspirin. I still feel like I should go back and make that film the first act of a bigger film. There is so much undeveloped material in there, which is the punishment for thinking you can write and shoot at the same time.

**Correct.**

**6** You and Anders Thomas Jensen created characters for *Red Road* for Andrea Arnold. What profession does Clyde Henderson advertise on the side of his van?

That I don't remember. It is so much Andrea's film. We created the characters, she created everything else. [*Hears answer*] Oh yes, of course! A locksmith! We did make that up!

**The correct answer is Locksmith.**

**7** Which cast member links *The Astronaut Wives Club* and *Sex And The City*?

That I don't know. [*Hears answer*] Of course! I would like to do more US television because I don't think I've learnt so much in such a short space of time.

**The correct answer is Evan Handler.**

**8** Finish Carey Mulligan's line of dialogue from *An Education*: "If you never do anything..."

It is probably something about "... you never become anyone." Aww, she is so sweet.

**Correct.**

**9** Your feature debut *The Birthday Trip* won what award at the Robert Awards (the Danish Oscars)?

I wonder what that could be? Music maybe? [*Hearing answer*] Of course. She deserved that. She was a proper theatre actress — she had played Hamlet — and was way out of my league at that point. Now it's embarrassing I don't remember.

**The correct answer is Best Actress for Dorota Pomykala.**

**10** In *One Day*, Anne Hathaway's Emma Morley says to Rafe Spall's Ian in an argument, "You just sat around farting and watching the bloody..." What film does she throw at him?

*The Wrath Of Khan!* [*Laughs*].

**Correct.**

## LONE SCHERFIG SCORES 6

"Maybe it proves I am not someone who sits in every night watching my own films, I'd rather look ahead and think about the next ones."

**THEIR FINEST IS OUT ON 14 AUGUST ON DOWNLOAD AND ON 21 AUGUST ON DVD AND BLU-RAY**





# THE FIRST-TAKE CLUB

Filling in those filmic blind spots, one person at a time

#15 DAVID BADDIEL ON TOKYO STORY

THIS MONTH'S FIRST Take Club inductee is David Baddiel, comedian, author, and man who had managed to avoid seeing a Japanese classic that placed 231st on our 301 Greatest Movies Of All Time list back in 2014...

When I was 17, my favourite film was Peter Greenaway's *The Draughtsman's Contract*. Not because it moved me, or made me laugh, or punch the air with joy. It was my favourite film because I was a twat, and genuinely thought cold, unengaging art films were what I liked.

What I thought I didn't like — and this was the point I was no doubt trying to make to the various arty girls who were not getting off with me anyway — was Hollywood pap.

Then, for a laugh, I went to see *E.T.* To sneer, and to demonstrate, through sneering, how untouched I was going to be by the syrupy sentimentalism the film was no doubt designed to provoke in a less discerning viewer. And I've never cried so much in my life. My face wasn't just wet with tears, it was awash with them. Steven Spielberg had burst a dam in my heart.

Since then, that's all I've really wanted from films: to make me cry. As a result I have, in general, avoided arthouse movies. Okay, I love Charlie Kaufman (even *Synecdoche, New York*); but he's funny, and the other emotional response I do like film to invoke is laughter. But your proper, Old-School Arthousers — Antonioni, Fellini, Eisenstein, Tarkovsky — on being offered





a chance to watch their films, I prefer to annoy cineastes by saying, “I’d rather watch *Horrible Bosses 2*.” Which, by the way, is a great movie.

One movie which is always, as football pundits say, there or thereabouts on these lists is Yasujiro Ozu’s *Tokyo Story*. It’s Arthouse, with a capital A. It’s black-and-white. It’s subtitled. It was made over 60 years ago. It’s incredibly slow. Every shot is framed to within an inch of its life. And most importantly, you can buy from Cambridge Film Handbooks a book of essays on the film, with titles like “Travel Toward And Away: Furusato And Journey In Tokyo Story”.

Initially, everything about *Tokyo Story* confirmed my prejudices. Most dialogue is shot full on, face directly to camera. Which means, to

the modern eye, watching *Tokyo Story* is a bit like watching a very unfunny episode of *Peep Show*.

But then, suddenly, I was hooked. Because *Tokyo Story* is not, in fact, an art film. Its emotional and narrative palette is extremely simple, which means you do the thing that art films most want you not to do: engage. There is nothing Brechtian about it. An aged couple come from their small town to visit their adult children in Tokyo. The children, though, are too busy to look after them. The parents go home and then — spoiler — the mum dies.

It’s a morality tale. It’s almost a kids’ movie. Its map of good and bad is childlike. The parents are absurdly sweet and innocent. The children are cold and unfeeling, apart from their angelic daughter-in-law, Noriko, the young widow of

their son, killed in the war. The dialogue is so straightforward as to be almost blank.

What this does is invest a very ordinary story with something like the power of myth. John Updike said that the job of art was “to give the mundane its beautiful due”, and this is what *Tokyo Story* does. And that story relates to all of us, particularly those of us who are no longer 17, and are coming to realise that that story, even more than the one about having an alien mate, is the one which truly matters. It can, I noticed as I turned away from the screen, make you cry.

**TOKYO STORY IS OUT NOW ON DVD AND BLU-RAY. DAVID BADDIEL’S NEW CHILDREN’S BOOK, *BIRTHDAY BOY*, IS OUT ON 7 SEPTEMBER**



Percy Fawcett  
(Charlie Hunnam)  
heads into battle  
with son Jack  
(Tom Holland).

# GRAY MATTERS

Filming in the jungle drives you mad, they say. *The Lost City Of Z's* James Gray doesn't agree

WORDS DAN JOLIN

JAMES GRAY SHOT the vast majority of *The Lost City Of Z*, his superb movie about the long-lost British explorer Percy Fawcett, in Northern Ireland. But when it came to the film's many jungle scenes, he, along with his cast and crew, relocated to Magdalena, Colombia, for ultra authenticity. Filming in the jungle has long had its risks — just ask the cast of *Predator*, or Werner Herzog — but in this frank interview, Gray refutes some of the more popular clichés...

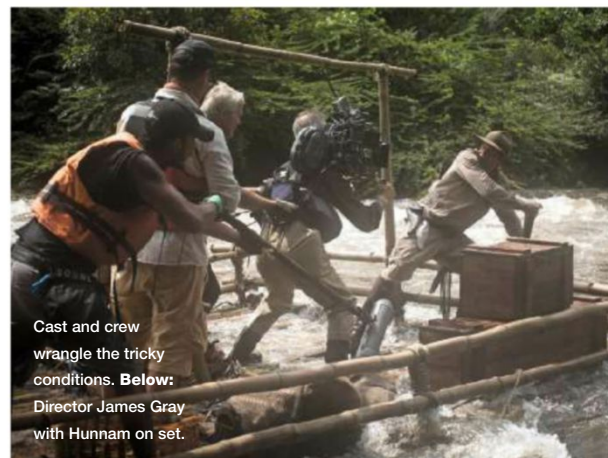
***The Lost City Of Z* bears some relation to Werner Herzog's *Aguirre, The Wrath Of God*. Was he a particular influence?**

It was impossible to avoid the influence of Werner Herzog, because you're in the same locations that he was, more or less — he was in Peru, I was in Colombia. And *Aguirre* is a towering film. So you have to both embrace that and avoid watching it. I didn't want to rip him off — I'm already ripping him off! But they're very different stories. *Aguirre*

is the story of a megalomaniacal, would-be conquistador who leads this group of people into madness and death. Here I felt the story was that Fawcett engaged with the jungle and came to terms with the humanity of the people in it. It would have been a terrible mistake to demand that he go crazy because it's the jungle and that's what makes a man crazy. I felt what would be more interesting is to rob white Western Europe and white North America of this fantasy that the jungle equals madness. The idea that the jungle invariably breeds insanity is a racist idea... Let me make this clear: I don't think Herzog's racist, because Aguirre's driven mad by his own megalomania and greed, but if Fawcett had gone crazy, it would have been racist because he would have gone crazy confronting a different form of the normal.

**It extends to filmmaking — there's the cliché of crews going mad while on wild location shoots. And yet you seemed to stay very sane...**

Well, we didn't go crazy by any stretch, but it was very physically difficult. You're in extremely hot weather and there are insects and animals everywhere, and it's not really meant for a film crew. My effort was to not exoticise the jungle, but say the opposite is true. And to whatever degree I could reinforce that in the means of production, I wanted to do so: take it one day at a time, try to plan as best you can.



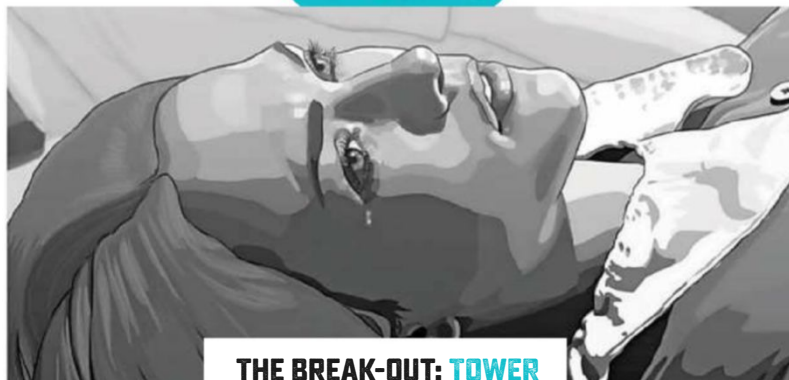
Cast and crew wrangle the tricky conditions. **Below:** Director James Gray with Hunnam on set.





# KIM NEWMAN'S VIDEO DUNGEON

Sorting the wheat from the chaff of straight-to-DTV films for almost 20 years



THE BREAK-OUT: TOWER

## Charlie Hunnam wasn't always the first choice to play Fawcett, was he?

Brad Pitt had bought the book and was gonna do it. But we couldn't quite put the movie together — it has such a dark ending — and then Brad went off, ironically enough, to make *World War Z*. So I decided, "This is never gonna happen," and went off to make *The Immigrant*. Then Brad's company Plan B called me and said, "What about Benedict Cumberbatch?" But his wife got pregnant so, with good reason, he had to drop out. Plan B called me again and said, "What about Charlie Hunnam?" and I said, "Absolutely not. I will not have any California biker dudes in this movie." Because the only thing I knew about him was *Sons Of Anarchy*. And they said, "No, he's from Newcastle, England." And the next thing I know, he's come over for spaghetti, and here's this dashing, handsome English guy. I thought he was terrific.

## Previous to this, you worked with Mark Wahlberg twice and Joaquin Phoenix four times. Why did you click so well with them?

Joaquin is an unbelievably intense, dedicated person who has tremendous emotional reserves. And Mark has a real earnestness that can be conveyed on screen in a magnificent way. Those are not common qualities; when you have two actors like that who will tolerate you and be willing to work with you on more than one occasion, you have to jump at the chance. I think Mark's been under-served by movies. If he were around in 1948, you would be casting him in film noirs. He'd be John Garfield, right? But they don't make those movies anymore. Today you wear spandex or wind up in a comedy with Will Ferrell. And he excels in that, but in some sense there's a sadness because you're not seeing another great side of Mark.

## This is only your sixth movie. In fact, you've made just five since your debut, *Little Odessa*, back in 1994. Why haven't you made more movies yourself?

I realise there are huge gaps in my filmography, but it's hard to get films made at a certain scale — and the truth is, I haven't taken a job just for the money. How do you go to the set every morning if you don't care about what you're making?

THE LOST CITY OF Z IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DOWNLOAD

THE  
EMPIRE  
VERDICT

THE LOST  
CITY OF Z

★★★★

CERT 15

What we said: "Solid and stately, a '70s-feeling jungle adventure film that's more of a thought-provoker than an excitement-inducer. But there's nothing wrong with that."

Notable extras: A commentary from Gray, behind-the-scenes footage, interviews and featurettes.

ON 1 AUGUST 1966, ex-Marine Charles Whitman took up position on top of the clock-tower at the University Of Texas in Austin with a small arsenal, and began shooting. In this powerfully evocative documentary, director Keith Maitland recreates the 96 minutes of horror through *Waking Life*-style rotoscope animation. Key survivors are interviewed, but appear on screen as cartoon versions of who they were then, with stunning moments late in the film as Maitland cuts to footage of them now. Black-and-white bleeds into colour as memories become more real, and there's great use made of contemporary music and the relentless crack of shots.

It's a feat to make a heartwarming film about mass murder, but this delivers truly moving moments — as a kid and his cousin, who were shot off their bikes,

reunite 50 years on, stressed to relive the trauma but delighted to see each other; or the moment which brings together Claire Wilson, who was pregnant when she was shot and lay on the baking-hot ground, and John 'Artly Snuff' Fox, the chess-playing teen who dragged her to safety

### QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Although it may sound like a good time, getting stoned and going to a haunted house is never a good idea." *The Haunted House On Kirby Road*

and still feels guilty he didn't do it sooner. Claire's story includes the remarkable intervention of a girl, Rita Star Pattern, who lay down with her in open sight of the killer to offer comfort.

There have been so many films about killers that it's a revelation that Whitman is of so little interest to Maitland. He never shows his face (until Claire shows a *LIFE* magazine feature with a photo of him aged three), rarely uses his name and keeps him up in the tower to concentrate on what matters: the people who were hurt or killed or had to do their job.

## THE ROUND-UP: CANADIAN HORROR

THE CANADIAN HORROR is thriving, with a Haunted Sex Motel Cinematic Universe in the offing. Jeff Maher's *Bed Of The Dead* features a four-poster made out of a gallows tree which winds up in a club where folks set on an orgy are trapped on it by demonic forces. Cody Calahan, co-writer of *Bed Of The Dead*, is the director of *Let Her Out*, in which bicycle messenger Helen (Alanna LeVierge) is obsessed with what happened to her mom in another haunted sex motel. She suffers as another personality literally (and hideously) tries to escape her body.

Elsewhere, remake rights to *Death Race 2000* have reverted to producer

Roger Corman, who has writer-director G.J. Echternkamp bring back the lively, gruesome satire of Paul Bartel's 1975 killers-in-cars skit for *Death Race 2050*. Champion racer Frankenstein (Manu Bennett, perfectly cast as a murderous, leather-clad hulk who's still the sanest man in the movie) competes with costumed psychos to splatter bystanders. Things have changed in the gun-loving heartlands: on the second day of the race, the pedestrians shoot back. It's more strident and cynical even than Bartel's film, but it's hard to dislike something so committed to scurrilous offensiveness.



# THE GUIDE

Everything else coming your way this month

## 14 AUGUST

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**CLASH** DVD, BLU-RAY  
**GOING IN STYLE** DVD, BLU-RAY  
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**SMURFS: THE LOST VILLAGE** DVD, BLU-RAY, DOWNLOAD  
**STARCRASH** DVD, BLU-RAY



CAST INTERVIEWS

### THE SENSE OF AN ENDING

DVD, BLU-RAY, DOWNLOAD

Ritesh Batra's fine adaptation of Julian Barnes' novel finds Jim Broadbent dealing with ghosts from the past. Broadbent is among the cast interviews on this release.

**THIRST** DVD  
**TORN CURTAIN** DVD, BLU-RAY, DOWNLOAD  
**THE TRANSFIGURATION** DVD, BLU-RAY  
**WHITE HEAT** BLU-RAY  
**WILLIAMS** DVD  
**WONDER DOG** DVD  
**THE ZOOKEEPER'S WIFE** DOWNLOAD (DVD, BLU-RAY 28 AUGUST)

## 21 AUGUST

**AMERICAN FABLE** DVD  
**THE BLEEDER** DVD, BLU-RAY  
**CASQUE D'OR** DVD, BLU-RAY  
**COME AND FIND ME** DVD, BLU-RAY, DOWNLOAD  
**A DAY IN THE DEATH OF JOE EGG** DVD, BLU-RAY



CLAYMATION SHORTS

### THE BELKO EXPERIMENT

DVD, BLU-RAY

(DOWNLOAD 18 AUGUST)

James Gunn's fun thriller also boasts tie-in shorts from Lee Hardcastle, a former finalist in our Done In 60 Seconds short film contest.

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**EDWARD AND CAROLINE** DVD, BLU-RAY  
**FINAL RECALL** DVD, BLU-RAY  
**GUARDIANS** DVD, BLU-RAY  
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**A HORSE FOR A FRIEND** DVD  
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**LADY MACBETH** DVD, BLU-RAY, DOWNLOAD  
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## 4 SEPTEMBER

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**ALONE** DVD



ON-SET FOOTAGE

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NEW INTERVIEW

### THE DAY OF THE JACKAL

DVD, BLU-RAY, DOWNLOAD

Fred Zinnemann's great assassination thriller comes with a new interview with Neil Sinyard, author of a book on the director, and the original screenplay, by Kenneth Ross.



# LIVE AUCTION

## ENTERTAINMENT MEMORABILIA

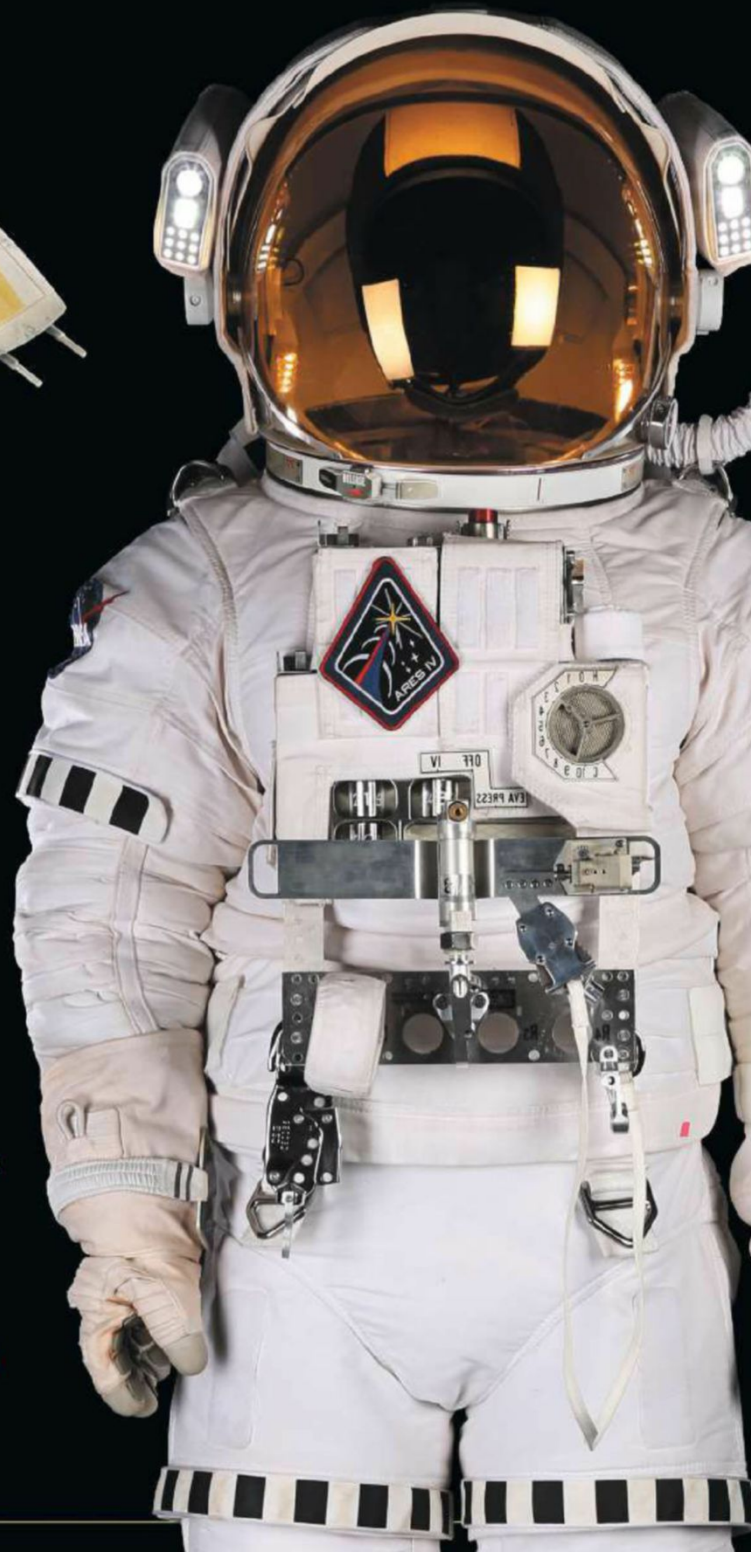
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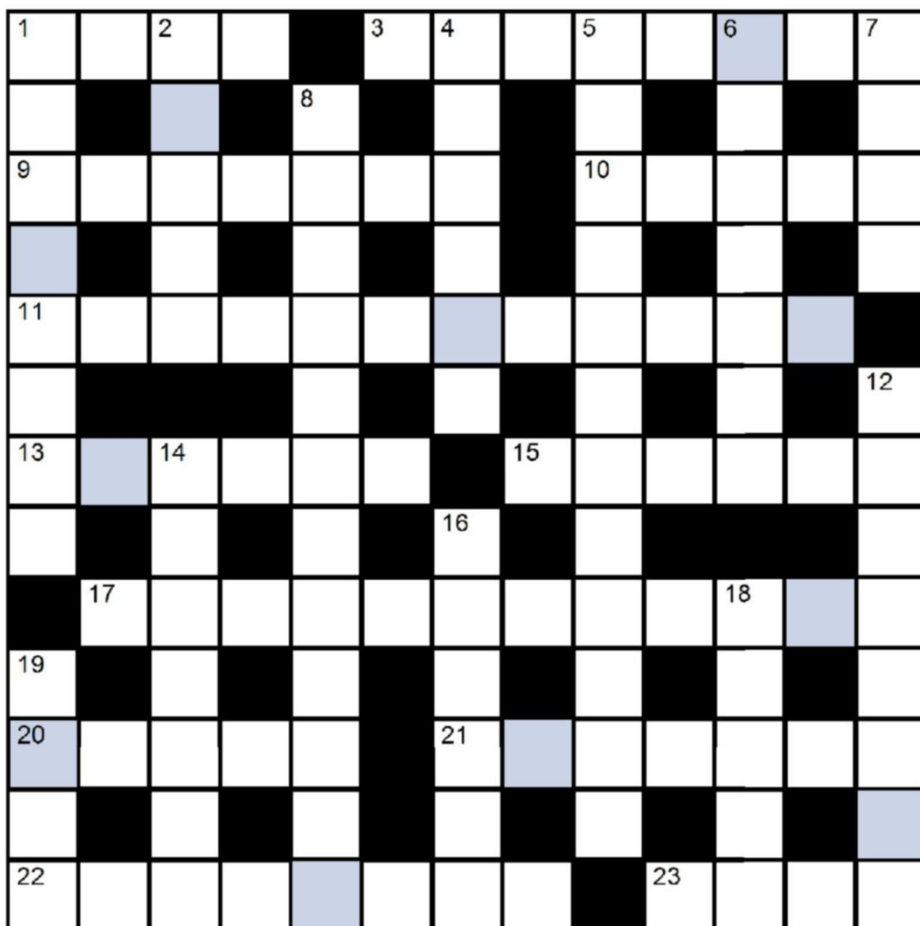
▶ Mark Watney's (Matt Damon) EVA Suit  
**MARTIAN, THE (2015)**  
£15,000-£20,000

▶ Mohawk Mogwai Puppet  
**GREMLINS 2: THE NEW BATCH (1990)**  
£6,000-£8,000





## CROSSWORD



### ACROSS

- 1** *Against All —*, song that nabbed Phil Collins an Oscar nomination (4)  
**3** The tagline read, "The world's most deliciously evil gentleman is back!" (8)  
**9/15 Across** The fifth *Transformers* movie (3,4,6)  
**10** *Piano*, *Canyon* or *Budapest Hotel* possibly (5)  
**11** Jet Li film with a Shakespearean connection (5,4,3)  
**13** Director amid Garstang-Leeds train (3,3)  
**15** See **9 Across**  
**17** She was zombie-loving Julie Grigio in *Warm Bodies* (6,6)  
**20** Tomb raider Lara (5)  
**21** Ethan Hawke starred in this vision of a eugenics-driven world (7)  
**22** Gifted like Matt Damon's Mr Ripley (8)  
**23** Billy Connolly's doggy delight (4)

### DOWN

- 1** Dustin Hoffman's medical-disaster movie (8)  
**2** House shared by Daniel Craig and Naomi Watts (5)  
**4** Not the king, just a film that starred Dudley Moore (6)  
**5** It involved Jim Jarmusch's five cab rides (5,2,5)  
**6** Mel Brooks' overheated saddles (7)  
**7** Cheryl, Diane, Alan maybe? (4)  
**8** He flew like Eddie The Eagle in 2016 (5,7)  
**12** Franchise that made its debut on just 32 screens in America in 1977 (4,4)  
**14** Pierce Brosnan's Canadian fur trapper (4,3)  
**16** Big Arnie's 2015 zombie movie (6)  
**18** Disney's Polynesian princess (5)  
**19** Rapper who was Tyler Moss in *Once Upon A Time In Brooklyn* (3,1)

## COMPETITION ENDS 4 SEPTEMBER

**HOW TO ENTER** Take the letters from each coloured square and rearrange them to form the name of an actor, actress, director or character. Text 'EMPIRE' to 83070, followed by your answer, name and address (with a space between each element of your message!). Texts cost 50p plus standard operator costs. Lines close at midnight, 4 September. Winners are selected at random. See below for terms and conditions.

**AUGUST ANSWERS ACROSS:** 7 Sleuth, 8/17 Olivia Wilde, 9 Hamm, 10 Bruce Lee, 11 Sunrise, 13 Enron, 15 Odeon, 16 Michael, 18 Cruising, 19 Rudy, 21 Howard, 22 McAvoy. **DOWN:** 1 Alda, 2 Summer Holiday, 3 The Boss, 4 Focus, 5 Life On The Road, 6 Timecode, 12 Undertow, 14 Big Game, 20 D-Tox. 18 Risen, 19 Elms. **ANAGRAM ADAM WEST**

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## COMPETITION



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# THE EMPIRE CLASSIC SCENE

THE GOONIES CHOSEN BY JAMES McAVOY



**James McAvoy:** "This is one of my favourite scenes of all time. It's the 'up there it's their time, down here it's our time' speech, where Mikey makes his plea for why the Goonies should carry on with their adventures and find One-Eyed Willy, and not just go back up the well and find safety and go back to their houses to have chocolate marshmallows and watch TV. Because this is their last moment to be children. 'Up there is their time.' That symbolises, if you go up there you become an adult and have to deal with adult issues. You stay here and you get to be children. I think that's fucking beautiful."

## INT. CAVERNS — NIGHT

Having been trapped in a network of underground caves on a search for hidden treasure, the Goonies — Mikey (Sean Astin), Mouth (Corey Feldman), Data (Ke Huy Quan), Brand (Josh Brolin), Andy (Kerri Green) and Stef (Martha Plimpton) — are on the verge of getting out via a bucket lowered into a chamber by Andy's boyfriend, Troy (Steve Antin).

**DATA:** I wanna go first, okay?

**BRAND:** Get outta there. I'm the eldest, so I'll call the shots. Andy goes first, I go second, Stef and Mikey third, you can go fourth.

*Meanwhile, as Brand's talking, Mikey is having an epiphany.*

**MIKEY:** Chester Copperpot. Chester Copperpot.

*He turns round to the group.*

**MIKEY:** CHESTER COPPERPOT!

*Everyone looks at him, including Andy, who is having a rope tied around her waist.*

**MIKEY:** Don't you guys see? Don't you realise? He was a pro, he never made it this far. Look how far we've come. We've got a chance.

**ANDY:** A chance at what, Mikey — getting killed? Look, if we keep going someone's really going to get hurt. Maybe dead. Besides, we've got to get to the police.

**MIKEY:** Maybe Chunk's already got to the police.

**ANDY:** Maybe Chunk is dead.

**MIKEY:** Don't say that! Never say that! Goonies never say die!

**ANDY:** I'm not a Goonie. I wanna go home.

**MIKEY:** Right. I forgot. But still... don't you realise? The next time you see sky, it'll be over another town. The next time you take a test, it'll be in some other school. Our parents, they want the best of stuff for us. But right now they gotta do what's right for them. Because it's their time. Their time. Up there. Down here, it's our time. It's our time down here. That's all over the second we ride up Troy's bucket.

*The Goonies look at each other, considering. Andy looks up at certain freedom. Mikey takes a blast on his inhaler.*

## EXT. WELL — NIGHT

*Troy and his mates are laughing heartily as they winch up the bucket. But their laughter stops when they see that the bucket doesn't contain Andy, but a yellow jacket. Troy's yellow jacket. With his name embroidered inside. He picks it up and, anguished, yells...*

**TROY:** Andy! You GOONIE!



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